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SCIENCE FICTION

APRIL 1954
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THE MIDAS PLAGUE
By Frederik Pohl

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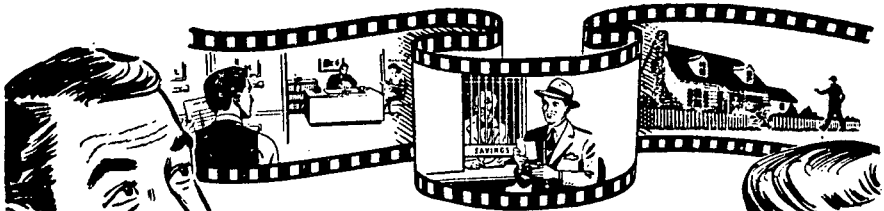

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APRIL, 1954 VOL. 8, NO. 1

Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

ALL ORIGINAL STORIES • NO REPRINTS!

CONTENTS

		PAGE
NOVELLA		
THE MIDAS PLAGUE	*by Frederik Pohl*	6
NOVELETS		
HANDS OFF	*by Robert Sheckley*	80
SPECIAL DELIVERY	*by Damon Knight*	138
SHORT STORIES		
LIMITING FACTOR	*by Theodore R. Cogswell*	59
WAINER	*by Michael Shaara*	105
BLACK CHARLIE	*by Gordon R. Dickson*	123
SCIENCE DEPARTMENT		
FOR YOUR INFORMATION	*by Willy Ley*	71
FEATURES		
EDITOR'S PAGE	*by H. L. Gold*	4
GALAXY'S FIVE STAR SHELF	*by Groff Conklin*	117

Cover by EMSH showing An Expedition to Eden

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What Strange Powers Did The Ancients Possess?

EVERY important discovery relating to mind power, sound thinking and cause and effect, as applied to self-advancement, was known centuries ago, before the masses could read and write.

Much has been written about the wise men of old. A popular fallacy has it that their secrets of personal power and successful living were lost to the world. Knowledge of nature's laws, accumulated through the ages, is never lost. At times the great truths possessed by the sages were hidden from unscrupulous men in high places, but never destroyed.

Why Were Their Secrets Closely Guarded?

Only recently, as time is measured; not more than twenty generations ago, less than 1/100th of 1% of the earth's people were thought capable of receiving basic knowledge about the laws of life, for it is an elementary truism that knowledge is power and that power cannot be entrusted to the ignorant and the unworthy.

Wisdom is not readily attainable by the general public; nor recognized when right within reach. The average person absorbs a multitude of details about things, but goes through life without ever knowing where and how to acquire mastery of the fundamentals of the inner mind—that mysterious silent something which "whispers" to you from within.

Fundamental Laws of Nature

Your habits, accomplishments and weaknesses are the effects of causes. Your thoughts and actions are governed by fundamental laws. Example: The law of compensation is as fundamental as the laws of breathing, eating and sleeping. All fixed laws of nature are as fascinating to study as they are vital to understand for success in life.

You can learn to find and follow every basic law of life. You can begin at any time to discover a whole new world of interesting truths. You can start at once to awaken your inner powers of self-understanding and self-advancement. You can learn from one of the world's oldest institutions, first known in America in 1694. Enjoying the high regard of hundreds of leaders, thinkers and teachers, the order is known as the Rosicrucian Brotherhood. Its complete name is the "Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis," abbreviated by the initials "AMORC." The teachings of the Order are not sold, for it is not a commercial organization, nor is it a religious sect. It is a non-profit fraternity, a brotherhood in the true sense.

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The ROSICRUCIANS
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STUFF & NONSENSE?

"CAREFUL not to walk under the boarding ladder, Capt. Florio climbed into the spaceship, counting so he'd enter the airlock with his left foot first. He made sure he had his lucky charm with him as he and the crew took the traditional drink for the road, and then the ceremonial last cigarette before takeoff. Florio was just in time to avert disaster. 'Not three on a match, you idiot!' he shouted at the astrogator."

No doubt of it—superstition will ride the rockets, along with atomics and computers. That's inevitable in the zoom from cave to spaceship in only a few thousand years.

Editing GALAXY and *BEYOND FANTASY FICTION,* I've found remarkably little conflict in the two seemingly opposed views. So, evidently, do many writers and readers, for they absorb and create them with the same enjoyment and stimulation.

Both science and superstition have the same purpose—to interpret reality. Both use the same methods — observation and deduction. Both have been astonishingly right and wrong.

The two basic differences are that science is dynamic, superstition static; and that absurdities are expunged from science—the Piltdown forgery, for example—while they are perpetuated in superstition. That, of course, is because science constantly challenges its findings, whereas superstition never does.

Nonetheless, it did what it set out to do, show cause and effect where none had been discernible, and it found more truth than it is generally given credit for.

If you want to investigate superstition in detail, the most complete record I've discovered is *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology & Legend,* edited by Maria Leach and published by Funk & Wagnalls in two imposing, truly beautiful volumes, with slipcase, at $20. Its more than 8,000 items form a body of beliefs so immense that no one, however enlighted, can escape having at least some, though they may be disguised as "common knowledge" or convictions "independently" arrived at.

Are they all incorrect? To think so is to be as blindly dogmatic as most irrational beliefs. Very many of our medicines—digitalis, ephedrine, quinine, among others—were folk remedies. Carrot diets were prescribed for conditions that we now can diagnose as vitamin deficiencies. Even our antibiotics were used

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in crude form, for moldy bread was applied to serious wounds centuries ago.

How many more ultra-modern advances lurk in superstition, just waiting to be uncovered by research? We have no idea and won't have until they're turned up. But only a dogmatist would condemn all folk beliefs as worthless.

Bergen Evans seems to do so in his *The Natural History of Nonsense* (Knopf, N.Y., $4), but that's because his is a subjective, crusading approach—Evans is a sort of anti-Fortean Charles Fort. Some of his debunking is embarrassing to those of us who innocently accepted such errors as the sense of direction in animals. We read constantly of dogs and cats finding their way home across the whole country—yet why are the Lost & Found ads so full of pets that couldn't make it across-town?

If our critters seem incredible, wait till the first men return with tales of those (if any) on other planets! Flamboyant as they'll be, however, many will inevitably contain facts that science will ultimately verify by plodding experiment.

I think that's what is so fascinating about science fiction and fantasy: the "What if—?" premise is answered in science fiction in realistic terms that may be entirely impossible, and in fantasy by supernatural-seeming terms that may be surprisingly true. But true or not, they both offer absorbing opportunities for guesswork and wonder for reader and writer.

Here is a puzzle for you to explore: How much of our "common knowledge" will fossilize into superstition?

The Jewish dietary laws make excellent sense, for instance—in a tropical country without refrigeration. They harden into ritual when transplanted to temperate climates, especially where there is meat inspection.

Or take the first automobiles. Manufactured by buggy-makers, they *were* buggies, except for motive power, even to the whip-holder alongside the driver!

Or the columns used in neo-Greek buildings — absolutely needless because of cantilever steel girders!

And spaceships—a wasteful needle design only because they must pierce the air. When we can assemble them out in space, they can be *any* shape. Yet the needle design may linger for years!

To get back to Capt. Florio and his touching farewell to Earth: Would three on a match apply to butane lighters? And what happens to the superstition when we have self-igniting cigarettes?

—H. L. GOLD

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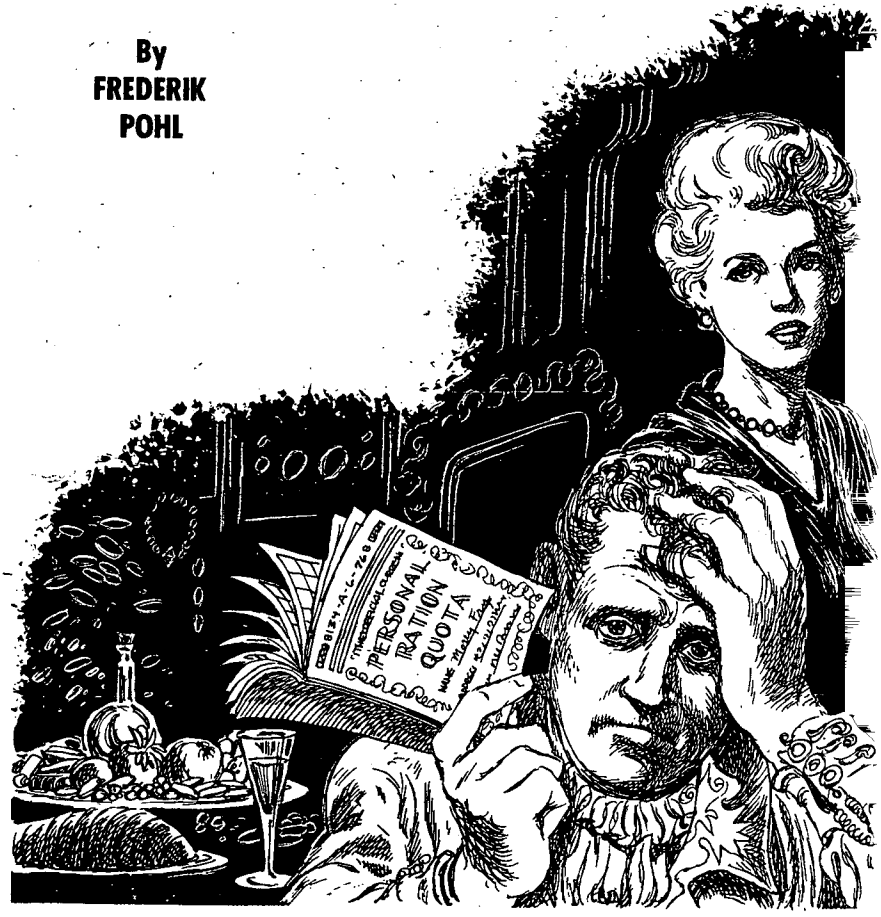
If our national budget makes Jefferson's seem laughable, how about future budgets? Well, take a look at Morey's problems!

The Midas Plague

By
FREDERIK
POHL



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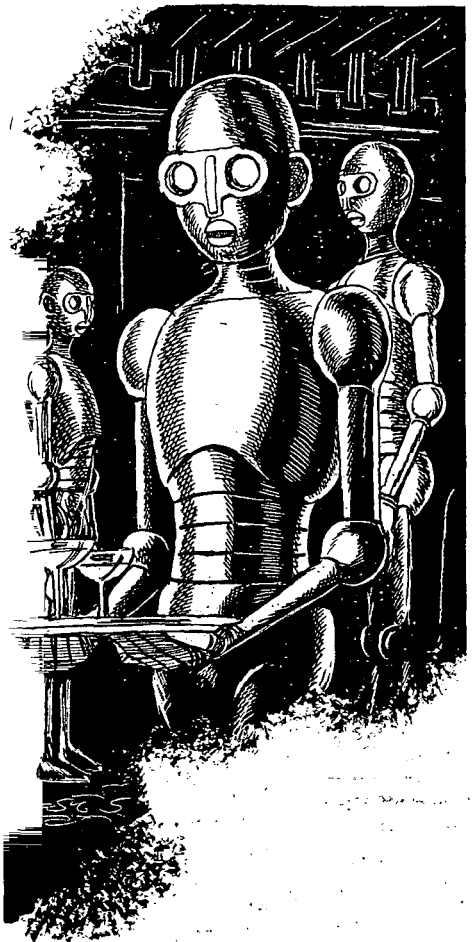

Illustrated by EMSH

AND so they were married. The bride and groom made a beautiful couple, she in her twenty-yard frill of immaculate white, he in his formal gray ruffled blouse and pleated pantaloons.

It was a small wedding—the best he could afford. For guests, they had only the immediate family and a few close friends. And when the minister had performed the ceremony, Morey Fry kissed his bride and they drove off to the reception. There were twenty-eight limousines in all (though it is true that twenty of them contained only the caterer's robots), and three flower cars.

"Bless you both," said old man Elon sentimentally. "You've got a fine girl in our Cherry, Morey." He blew his nose on a ragged square of cambric.

The old folks behaved very well, Morey thought. At the reception, surrounded by the enormous stacks of wedding gifts, they drank the champagne and ate a great many of the tiny, delicious canapes. They listened politely to the fifteen-piece orchestra, and Cherry's mother even danced one dance with Morey for sentiment's sake, though it was clear that dancing was far from the usual pattern of her life. They tried as hard as they could to blend into the gathering, but all the same, the two elderly figures

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in severely simple and probably rented garments were dismayingly conspicuous in the quarter-acre of tapestries and tinkling fountains that was the main ballroom of Morey's country home.

When it was time for the guests to go home and let the newlyweds begin their life together, Cherry's father shook Morey by the hand and Cherry's mother kissed him. But as they drove away in their tiny runabout, their faces were full of foreboding.

It was nothing against Morey as a person, of course. But poor people should not marry wealth.

MOREY and Cherry loved each other, certainly. That helped. They told each other so, a dozen times an hour, all of the long hours they were together, for all of the first months of their marriage. Morey even took time off to go shopping with his bride, which endeared him to her enormously. They drove their shopping carts through the immense vaulted corridors of the supermarket, Morey checking off the items on the shopping list as Cherry picked out the goods. It was fun.

For a while.

Their first fight started in the supermarket, between Breakfast Foods and Floor Furnishings, just where the new Precious Stones department was being opened.

Morey called off from the list, "Diamond lavaliere, costume rings, earbobs."

Cherry said rebelliously, "Morey, I *have* a lavaliere. Please, dear!"

Morey folded back the pages of the list uncertainly. The lavaliere was on there, all right, and no alternative selection was shown.

"How about a bracelet?" he coaxed. "Look, they have some nice ruby ones there. See how beautifully they go with your hair, darling!" He beckoned a robot clerk, who bustled up and handed Cherry the bracelet tray. "Lovely," Morey exclaimed as Cherry slipped the largest of the lot on her wrist.

"And I don't have to have a lavaliere?" Cherry asked.

"Of course not." He peeked at the tag. "Same number of ration points exactly!" Since Cherry looked only dubious, not convinced, he said briskly, "And now we'd better be getting along to the shoe department. I've got to pick up some dancing pumps."

Cherry made no objection, neither then nor throughout the rest of their shopping tour. At the end, while they were sitting in the supermarket's ground-floor lounge, waiting for the robot accountants to tote up their bill and the robot cashiers to stamp their ration books, Morey remembered

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to have the shipping department save out the bracelet.

"I don't want that sent with the other stuff, darling," he explained. "I want you to wear it right now. Honestly, I don't think I ever saw anything looking so *right* for you."

Cherry looked flustered and pleased. Morey was delighted with himself; it wasn't everybody who knew how to handle these little domestic problems just right!

HE stayed self-satisfied all the way home, while Henry, their companion-robot, regaled them with funny stories of the factory in which it had been built and trained. Cherry wasn't used to Henry by a long shot, but it was hard not to like the robot. Jokes and funny stories when you needed amusement, sympathy when you were depressed, a never-failing supply of news and information on any subject you cared to name—Henry was easy enough to take. Cherry even made a special point of asking Henry to keep them company through dinner, and she laughed as thoroughly as Morey himself at its droll anecdotes.

But later, in the conservatory, when Henry had considerately left them alone, the laughter dried up.

Morey didn't notice. He was very conscientiously making the rounds: turning on the tri-D, selecting their after-dinner liqueurs, scanning the evening newspapers.

Cherry cleared her throat self-consciously, and Morey stopped what he was doing. "Dear," she said tentatively. "I'm feeling kind of restless tonight. Could we—I mean do you think we could just sort of stay home and—well, relax?"

Morey looked at her with a touch of concern. She lay back wearily, eyes half closed. "Are you feeling all right?" he asked.

"Perfectly. I just don't want to go out tonight, dear. I don't feel up to it."

He sat down and automatically lit a cigarette. "I see," he said. The tri-D was beginning a comedy show; he got up to turn it off, snapping on the tape-player. Muted strings filled the room.

"We had reservations at the club tonight," he reminded her.

Cherry shifted uncomfortably. "I know."

"And we have the opera tickets that I turned last week's in for. I hate to nag, darling, but we haven't used *any* of our opera tickets."

"We can see them right here on the tri-D," she said in a small voice.

"That has nothing to do with it, sweetheart. I—I didn't want to tell you about it, but Wainwright,

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down at the office, said something to me yesterday. He told me he would be at the circus last night and as much as said he'd be looking to see if we were there, too. Well, we weren't there. Heaven knows what I'll tell him next week."

He waited for Cherry to answer, but she was silent.

He went on reasonably, "So if you *could* see your way clear to going out tonight—"

He stopped, slack-jawed. Cherry was crying, silently and in quantity.

"Darling!" he said inarticulately.

He hurried to her, but she fended him off. He stood helpless over her, watching her cry.

"Dear, what's the matter?" he asked.

She turned her head away.

MOREY rocked back on his heels. It wasn't exactly the first time he'd seen Cherry cry—there had been that poignant scene when they Gave Each Other Up, realizing that their backgrounds were too far apart for happiness, before the realization that they *had* to have each other, no matter what . . . But it was the first time her tears had made him feel guilty.

And he did feel guilty. He stood there staring at her.

Then he turned his back on her and walked over to the bar. He ignored the ready liqueurs and poured two stiff highballs, brought them back to her. He set one down beside her, took a long drink from the other.

In quite a different tone, he said, "Dear, what's the *matter*?"

No answer.

"Come on. What is it?"

She looked up at him and rubbed at her eyes. Almost sullenly, she said, "Sorry."

"I know you're sorry. Look, we love each other. Let's talk this thing out."

She picked up her drink and held it for a moment, before setting it down untasted. "What's the use, Morey?"

"Please. Let's try."

She shrugged.

He went on remorselessly, "You aren't happy, are you? And it's because of—well, all this." His gesture took in the richly furnished conservatory, the thick-piled carpet, the host of machines and contrivances for their comfort and entertainment that waited for their touch. By implication it took in twenty-six rooms, five cars, nine robots. Morey said, with an effort, "It isn't what you're used to, is it?"

"I can't help it," Cherry said. "Morey, you know I've tried. But back home—"

"Dammit," he flared, "*this* is your home. You don't live with

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your father any more in that five-room cottage; you don't spend your evenings hoeing the garden or playing cards for matchsticks. You live here, with me, your husband! You knew what you were getting into. We talked all this out long before we were married—"

The words stopped, because words were useless. Cherry was crying again, but not silently.

Through her tears, she wailed: "Darling, I've tried. You don't *know* how I've tried! I've worn all those silly clothes and I've played all those silly games and I've gone out with you as much as I *possibly* could and—I've eaten all that terrible food until I'm actually getting fa-fa-*fat!* I thought I could stand it. But I just can't go on like this; I'm not used to it. I—I love you, Morey, but I'm going crazy, living like this. I can't help it, Morey—*I'm tired of being poor!*"

EVENTUALLY the tears dried up, and the quarrel healed, and the lovers kissed and made up. But Morey lay awake that night, listening to his wife's gentle breathing from the suite next to his own, staring into the darkness as tragically as any pauper before him had ever done.

Blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit the Earth.

Blessed Morey, heir to more worldly goods than he could possibly consume.

Morey Fry, steeped in grinding poverty, had never gone hungry a day in his life, never lacked for anything his heart could desire in the way of food, or clothing, or a place to sleep. In Morey's world, no one lacked for these things; no one could.

Malthus was right—for a civilization without machines, automatic factories, hydroponics and food synthesis, nuclear breeder plants, ocean-mining for metals and minerals . . .

And a vastly increasing supply of labor . . .

And architecture that rose high in the air and dug deep in the ground and floated far out on the water on piers and pontoons . . . architecture that could be poured one day and lived in the next . . .

And robots.

Above all, robots . . . robots to burrow and haul and smelt and fabricate, to build and farm and weave and sew.

What the land lacked in wealth, the sea was made to yield and the laboratory invented the rest . . . and the factories became a pipeline of plenty, churning out enough to feed and clothe and house a dozen worlds.

Limitless discovery, infinite power in the atom, tireless labor of humanity and robots, mechanization that drove jungle and

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swamp and ice off the Earth, and put up office buildings and manufacturing centers and rocket ports in their place . . .

The pipeline of production spewed out riches that no king in the time of Malthus could have known.

But a pipeline has two ends. The invention and power and labor pouring in at one end must somehow be drained out at the other . . .

Lucky Morey, blessed economic consuming unit, drowning in the pipeline's flood, striving manfully to eat and drink and wear and wear out his share of the ceaseless tide of wealth.

Morey felt far from blessed, for the blessings of the poor are always best appreciated from afar.

QUOTAS worried his sleep until he awoke at eight o'clock the next morning, red-eyed and haggard, but inwardly resolved. He had reached a decision. He was starting a new life.

There was trouble in the morning mail. Under the letterhead of the National Ration Board, it said:

"We regret to advise you that the following items returned by you in connection with your August quotas as used and no longer serviceable have been inspected and found insufficiently worn."

The list followed—a long one, Morey saw to his sick disappointment. "Credit is hereby disallowed for these and you are therefore given an additional consuming quota for the current month in the amount of 435 points, at least 350 points of which must be in the textile and home-furnishing categories."

Morey dashed the letter to the floor. The valet picked it up emotionlessly, creased it and set it on his desk.

It wasn't fair! All right, maybe the bathing trunks and beach umbrellas hadn't been *really* used very much—though how the devil, he asked himself bitterly, did you go about using up swimming gear when you didn't have time for such leisurely pursuits as swimming? But certainly the hiking slacks were used! He'd worn them for three whole days and part of a fourth; what did they expect him to do, go around in *rags*?

Morey looked belligerently at the coffee and toast that the valet-robot had brought in with the mail, and then steeled his resolve. Unfair or not, he had to play the game according to the rules. It was for Cherry, more than for himself, and the way to begin a new way of life was to begin it.

Morey was going to consume for two.

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He told the valet-robot, "Take that stuff back. I want cream and sugar with the coffee—*lots* of cream and sugar. And besides the toast, scrambled eggs, fried potatoes, orange juice—no, make it half a grapefruit. *And* orange juice, come to think of it."

"Right away, sir," said the valet. "You won't be having breakfast at nine then, will you, sir?"

"I certainly will," said Morey virtuously. "Double portions!" As the robot was closing the door, he called after it, "Butter and marmalade with the toast!"

HE went to the bath; he had a full schedule and no time to waste. In the shower, he carefully sprayed himself with lather three times. When he had rinsed the soap off, he went through the whole assortment of taps in order: three lotions, plain talcum, scented talcum and thirty seconds of ultra-violet. Then he lathered and rinsed again, and dried himself with a towel instead of using the hot-air drying jet. Most of the miscellaneous scents went down the drain with the rinse water, but if the Ration Board accused him of waste, he could claim he was experimenting. The effect, as a matter of fact, wasn't bad at all.

He stepped out, full of exuberance. Cherry was awake, staring in dismay at the tray the valet had brought. "Good morning, dear," she said faintly. "Ugh."

Morey kissed her and patted her hand. "Well!" he said, looking at the tray with a big, hollow smile. "Food!"

"Isn't that a *lot* for just the two of us?"

"Two of us?" repeated Morey masterfully. "Nonsense, my dear. I'm going to eat it all by myself!"

"Oh, Morey!" gasped Cherry, and the adoring look she gave him was enough to pay for a dozen such meals.

Which, he thought as he finished his morning exercises with the sparring-robot and sat down to his *real* breakfast, it just about had to be, day in and day out, for a long, long time.

Still, Morey had made up his mind. As he worked his way through the kippered herring, tea and crumpets, he ran over his plans with Henry. He swallowed a mouthful and said, "I want you to line up some appointments for me right away. Three hours a week in an exercise gym—pick one with lots of reducing equipment, Henry. I think I'm going to need it. And fittings for some new clothes—I've had these for weeks. And, let's see, doctor, dentist—say, Henry, don't I have a psychiatrist's date coming up?"

"Indeed you do, sir!" it said warmly. "This morning, in fact.

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I've already instructed the chauffeur and notified your office."

"Fine! Well, get started on the other things, Henry."

"Yes, sir," said Henry, and assumed the curious absent look of a robot talking on its TBR circuits—the "Talk Between Robots" radio—as it arranged the appointments for its master.

MOREY finished his breakfast in silence, pleased with his own virtue, at peace with the world. It wasn't so hard to be a proper, industrious consumer if you *worked* at it, he reflected. It was only the malcontents, the ne'er-do-wells and the incompetents who simply could not adjust to the world around them. Well, he thought with distant pity, someone had to suffer; you couldn't break eggs without making an omelet. And his proper duty was not to be some sort of wild-eyed crank, challenging the social order and beating his breast about injustice, but to take care of his wife and his home.

It was too bad he couldn't really get right down to work on consuming today. But this was his one day a week to hold a *job* —four of the other six days were devoted to solid consuming—and, besides, he had a group therapy session scheduled as well. His analysis, Morey told himself, would certainly take a sharp turn for the better, now that he had faced up to his problems.

Morey was immersed in a glow of self-righteousness as he kissed Cherry good-by (she had finally got up, all in a confusion of delight at the new regime) and walked out the door to his car. He hardly noticed the little man in enormous floppy hat and garishly ruffled trousers who was standing almost hidden in the shrubs.

"Hey, Mac." The man's voice was almost a whisper.

"Huh? Oh—what is it?"

The man looked around furtively. "Listen, friend," he said rapidly, "you look like an intelligent man who could use a little help. Times are tough; you help me, I'll help you. Want to make a deal on ration stamps? Six for one. One of yours for six of mine, the best deal you'll get anywhere in town. Naturally, my stamps aren't exactly the real McCoy, but they'll pass, friend, they'll pass—"

Morey blinked at him. "No!" he said violently, and pushed the man aside. Now it's racketeers, he thought bitterly. Slums and endless sordid preoccupation with rations weren't enough to inflict on Cherry; now the neighborhood was becoming a hangout for people on the shady side of the law. It was not, of course, the first time he had ever been approached

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by a counterfeit ration-stamp hoodlum, but never at his own front door!

Morey thought briefly, as he climbed into his car, of calling the police. But certainly the man would be gone before they could get there; and, after all, he had handled it pretty well as it was.

Of course, it would be nice to get six stamps for one.

But very far from nice if he got caught.

"GOOD morning, Mr. Fry," tinkled the robot receptionist. "Won't you go right in?" With a steel-tipped finger, it pointed to the door marked GROUP THERAPY.

Someday, Morey vowed to himself as he nodded and complied, he would be in a position to afford a private analyst of his own. Group therapy helped relieve the infinite stresses of modern living, and without it he might find himself as badly off as the hysterical mobs in the ration riots, or as dangerously antisocial as the counterfeiters. But it lacked the personal touch. It was, he thought, too public a performance of what should be a private affair, like trying to live a happy married life with an interfering, ever-present crowd of robots in the house—

Morey brought himself up in panic. How had *that* thought crept in? He was shaken visibly as he entered the room and greeted the group to which he was assigned.

There were eleven of them: four Freudians, two Reichians, two Jungians, a Gestalter, a shock therapist and the elderly and rather quiet Sullivanite. Even the members of the majority groups had their own individual differences in technique and creed, but, despite four years with this particular group of analysts, Morey hadn't quite been able to keep them separate in his mind. Their names, though, he knew well enough.

"Morning, Doctors," he said. "What is it today?"

"Morning," said Semmelweiss morosely. "Today you come into the room for the first time looking as if something is really bothering you, and yet the schedule calls for psychodrama. Dr. Fairless," he appealed; "can't we change the schedule a little bit? Fry here is obviously under a strain; *that*'s the time to start digging and see what he can find. We can do your psychodrama next time, can't we?"

Fairless shook his gracefully bald old head. "Sorry, Doctor. If it were up to me, of course—but you know the rules."

"Rules, rules," jeered Semmelweiss. "Ah, what's the use? Here's a patient in an acute anxiety state

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if I ever saw one—and believe me, I saw plenty—and we ignore it because the *rules* say ignore it. Is that professional? Is that how to cure a patient?"

Little Blaine said frostily, "If I may say so, Dr. Semmelweiss, there have been a great many cures made without the necessity of departing from the rules. I myself, in fact—"

"You yourself!" mimicked Semmelweiss. "You yourself never handled a patient alone in your life. When you going to get out of a group, Blaine?"

Blaine said furiously, "Dr. Fairless, I don't think I have to stand for this sort of personal attack. Just because Semmelweiss has seniority and a couple of private patients one day a week, he thinks—"

"Gentlemen," said Fairless mildly. "Please, let's get on with the work. Mr. Fry has come to us for help, not to listen to us losing our tempers."

"Sorry," said Semmelweiss curtly. "All the same, I appeal from the arbitrary and mechanistic ruling of the chair."

Fairless inclined his head. "All in favor of the ruling of the chair? Nine, I count. That leaves only you opposed, Dr. Semmelweiss. We'll proceed with the psychodrama, if the recorder will read us the notes and comments of the last session."

THE recorder, a pudgy, low-ranking youngster named Sprogue, flipped back the pages of his notebook and read in a chanting voice, "Session of 24 May, subject, Morey Fry; in attendence, Doctors Fairless, Bileck, Semmelweiss, Carrado, Weber—"

Fairless interrupted kindly, "Just the last page, if you please, Dr. Sprogue."

"Um—oh, yes. After a ten-minute recess for additional Rorschachs and an electro-encephalogram, the group convened and conducted rapid-fire word association. Results were tabulated and compared with standard deviation patterns, and it was determined that subject's major traumas derived from, respectively—"

Morey found his attention waning. Therapy was *good;* everybody knew that, but every once in a while he found it a little dull. If it weren't for therapy, though, there was no telling what might happen. Certainly, Morey told himself, he had been helped considerably—at least he hadn't set fire to his house and shrieked at the fire-robots, like Newell down the block when his eldest daughter divorced her husband and came back to live with him, bringing her ration quota along, of course. Morey hadn't even been *tempted* to do anything as outrageously, frighteningly im-

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moral as *destroy* things or *waste* them—well, he admitted to himself honestly, perhaps a little tempted, once in a great while. But never anything important enough to worry about; he was sound, perfectly sound.

He looked up, startled. All the doctors were staring at him. "Mr. Fry," Fairless repeated, "will you take your place?"

"Certainly," Morey said hastily. "Uh—where?"

Semmelweiss guffawed. "*Told* you. Never mind, Morey; you didn't miss much. We're going to run through one of the big scenes in your life, the one you told us about last time. Remember? You were fourteen years old, you said. Christmas time. Your mother had made you a promise."

Morey swallowed. "I remember," he said unhappily. "Well, all right. Where do I stand?"

"Right here," said Fairless. "You're you, Carrado is your mother, I'm your father. Will the doctors not participating mind moving back? Fine. Now, Morey, here we are on Christmas morning. Merry Christmas, Morey!"

"Merry Christmas," Morey said half-heartedly. "Uh—Father dear, where's my—uh—my puppy that Mother promised me?"

"Puppy!" said Fairless heartily. "Your mother and I have something much better than a puppy for you. Just take a look under the tree there—it's a *robot!* Yes, Morey, your very own robot—a full-size 38-tube fully automatic companion robot for you! Go ahead, Morey, go right up and speak to it. Its name is Henry. Go on, boy."

Morey felt a sudden, incomprehensible tingle inside the bridge of his nose. He said shakily, "But I—I didn't *want* a robot."

"Of course you want a robot," Carrado interrupted. "Go on, child, play with your nice robot."

Morey said violently, "I *hate* robots!" He looked around him at the doctors, at the gray-paneled consulting room. He added defiantly, "You hear me, all of you? I *still* hate robots!"

There was a second's pause; then the questions began.

It was half an hour before the receptionist came in and announced that time was up.

In that half hour, Morey had got over his trembling and lost his wild, momentary passion, but he had remembered what for thirteen years he had forgotten.

He hated robots.

THE surprising thing was not that young Morey had hated robots. It was that the Robot Riots, the ultimate violent outbreak of flesh against metal, the battle to the death between mankind and its machine heirs . . .

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never happened. A little boy hated robots, but the man he became worked with them hand in hand.

And yet, always and always before, the new worker, the competitor for the job, was at once and inevitably outside the law. The waves swelled in—the Irish, the Negroes, the Jews, the Italians. They were squeezed into their ghettoes, where they encysted, seethed and struck out, until the burgeoning generations became indistinguishable.

For the robots, that genetic relief was not in sight. And still the conflict never came. The feedback circuits aimed the anti-aircraft guns and, reshaped and newly planned, found a place in a new sort of machine—together with a miraculous trail of cams and levers, an indestructible and potent power source and a hundred thousand parts and subassemblies.

And the first robot clanked off the bench.

Its mission was its own destruction; but from the scavenged wreck of its pilot body, a hundred better robots drew their inspiration. And the hundred went to work, and hundreds more, until there were millions upon untold millions.

And still the riots never happened.

For the robots came bearing a gift and the name of it was "Plenty."

And by the time the gift had shown its own unguessed ills, the time for a Robot Riot was past. Plenty is a habit-forming drug. You do not cut the dosage down. You kick it if you can; you stop the dose entirely. But the convulsions that follow may wreck the body once and for all.

The addict craves the grainy white powder; he doesn't hate it, or the runner who sells it to him. And if Morey as a little boy could hate the robot that had deprived him of his pup, Morey the man was perfectly aware that the robots were his servants and his friends.

But the little Morey inside the man—*he* had never been convinced.

MOREY ordinarily looked forward to his work. The one day a week at which he *did* anything was a wonderful change from the dreary consume, consume, consume grind. He entered the bright-lit drafting room of the Bradmoor Amusements Company with a feeling of uplift.

But as he was changing from street garb to his drafting smock, Howland from Procurement came over with a knowing look. "Wainwright's been looking for you," Howland whispered. "Better get right in there."

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Morey nervously thanked him and got. Wainwright's office was the size of a phone booth and as bare as Antarctic ice. Every time Morey saw it, he felt his insides churn with envy. Think of a desk with nothing on it but work surface — no calendar-clock, no twelve-color pen rack, no dictating machines!

He squeezed himself in and sat down while Wainwright finished a phone call. He mentally reviewed the possible reasons why Wainwright would want to talk to him in person instead of over the phone, or by dropping a word to him as he passed through the drafting room.

Very few of them were good.

Wainwright put down the phone and Morey straightened up. "You sent for me?" he asked.

Wainwright in a chubby world was aristocratically lean. As General Superintendent of the Design & Development Section of the Bradmoor Amusements Company, he ranked high in the upper section of the well-to-do. He rasped, "I certainly did. Fry, just what the hell do you think you're up to now?"

"I don't know what you m-mean, Mr. Wainwright," Morey stammered, crossing off the list of possible reasons for the interview all of the good ones.

Wainwright snorted. "I guess you don't. Not because you weren't told, but because you don't want to know. Think back a whole week. What did I have you on the carpet for then?"

Morey said sickly, "My ration book. Look, Mr. Wainwright, I know I'm running a little bit behind, but—"

"But nothing! How do you think it looks to the Committee, Fry? They got a complaint from the Ration Board about you. Naturally they passed it on to me. And naturally I'm going to pass it right along to you. The question is, what are you going to do about it? Good God, man, look at these figures—textiles, fifty-one per cent; food, sixty-seven per cent; amusements and entertainment, *thirty* per cent! You haven't come up to your ration in anything for months!"

Morey stared at the card miserably. "We—that is, my wife and I—just had a long talk about that last night, Mr. Wainwright. And, believe me, we're going to do better. We're going to buckle right down and get to work and—uh—do better," he finished weakly.

Wainwright nodded, and for the first time there was a note of sympathy in his voice. "Your wife. Judge Elon's daughter, isn't she? Good family. I've met the Judge many times." Then, gruffly, "Well, nevertheless, Fry, I'm warning you. I don't care how

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you straighten this out, but *don't let the Committee mention this to me again.*"

"No, sir."

"All right. Finished with the schematics on the new K-50?"

Morey brightened. "Just about, sir! I'm putting the first section on tape today. I'm very pleased with it, Mr. Wainwright, honestly I am. I've got more than eighteen thousand moving parts in it now, and that's without—"

"Good. Good." Wainwright glanced down at his desk. "Get back to it. And straighten out this other thing. You can do it, Fry. Consuming is everybody's duty. Just keep that in mind."

HOWLAND followed Morey out of the drafting room, down to the spotless shops. "Bad time?" he inquired solicitously. Morey grunted. It was none of Howland's business.

Howland looked over his shoulder as he was setting up the programing panel. Morey studied the matrices silently, then got busy reading the summary tapes, checking them back against the schematics, setting up the instructions on the programing board. Howland kept quiet as Morey completed the setup and ran off a test tape. It checked perfectly; Morey stepped back to light a cigarette in celebration before pushing the *start* button.

Howland said, "Go on, run it. I can't go until you put it in the works."

Morey grinned and pushed the button. The board lighted up; within it, a tiny metronomic beep began to pulse. That was all. At the other end of the quarter-mile shed, Morey knew, the automatic sorters and conveyers were fingering through the copper reels and steel ingots, measuring hoppers of plastic powder and colors, setting up an intricate weaving path for the thousands of individual components that would make up Bradmoor's new K-50 Spin-a-Game. But from where they stood, in the elaborately muraled programing room, nothing showed. Bradmoor was an ultra-modernized plant; in the manufacturing end, even robots had been dispensed with in favor of machines that guided themselves.

Morey glanced at his watch and logged in the starting time while Howland quickly counter-checked Morey's raw-material flow program.

"Checks out," Howland said solemnly, slapping him on the back. "Calls for a celebration. Anyway, it's your first design, isn't it?"

"Yes. First all by myself, at any rate."

Howland was already fishing in his private locker for the bottle he kept against emergency needs.

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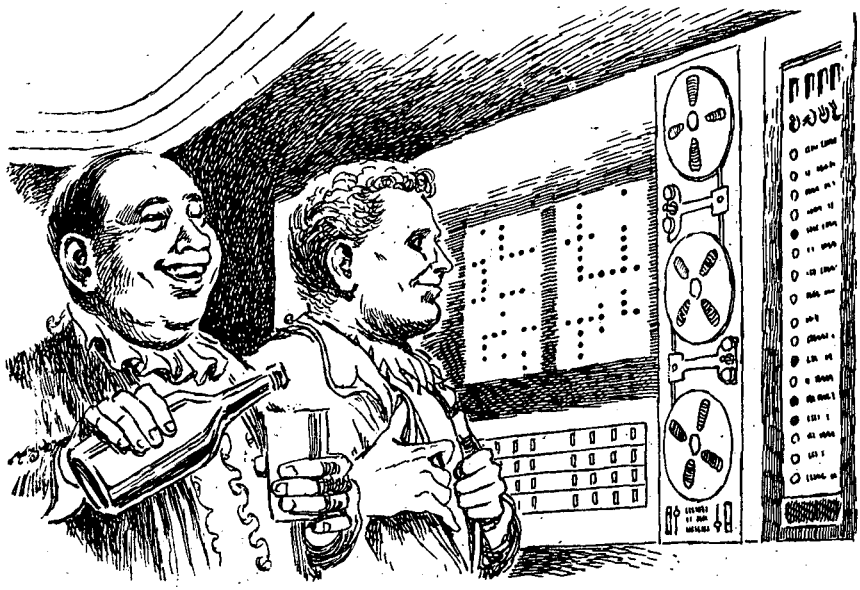

He poured with a flourish. "To Morey Fry," he said, "our most favorite designer, in whom we are much pleased."

Morey drank. It went down easily enough. Morey had conscientiously used his liquor rations for years, but he had never gone beyond the minimum, so that although liquor was no new experience to him, the single drink immediately warmed him. It warmed his mouth, his throat, the hollows of his chest; and it settled down with a warm glow inside him. Howland, exerting himself to be nice, complimented Morey fatuously on the design and poured another drink. Morey didn't utter any protest at all.

Howland drained his glass. "You may wonder," he said formally, "why I am so pleased with you, Morey Fry. I will tell you why this is."

Morey grinned. "Please do."

Howland nodded. "I will. It's because I am pleased with the world, Morey. My wife left me last night."

MOREY was as shocked as only a recent bridegroom can be by the news of a crumbling marriage. "That's too ba—I mean is that a fact?"

"Yes, she left my beds and board and five robots, and I'm

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happy to see her go." He poured another drink for both of them. "Women. Can't live with them and can't live without them. First you sigh and pant and chase after 'em—you like poetry?" he demanded suddenly.

Morey said cautiously, "Some poetry."

Howland quoted: " 'How long, my love, shall I behold this wall between our gardens—yours the rose, and mine the swooning lily.' Like it? I wrote it for Jocelyn—that's my wife—when we were first going together."

"It's beautiful," said Morey.

"She wouldn't talk to me for two days." Howland drained his drink. "Lots of spirit, that girl. Anyway, I hunted her like a tiger. And then I caught her. *Wow!*"

Morey took a deep drink from his own glass. "What do you mean, *wow*?" he asked.

"*Wow*." Howland pointed his finger at Morey. "*Wow,* that's what I mean. We got married and I took her home to the dive I was living in, and *wow* we had a kid, and *wow* I got in a little trouble with the Ration Board—nothing serious, of course, but there was a mixup—and *wow* fights.

"Everything was a fight," he explained. "She'd start with a little nagging, and naturally I'd say something or other back, and *bang* we were off. Budget, budget, budget; I hope to die if I ever hear the word 'budget' again. Morey, you're a married man; you know what it's like. Tell me the truth, weren't you just about ready to blow your top the first time you caught your wife cheating on the budget?"

"Cheating on the budget?" Morey was startled. "Cheating how?"

"Oh, lots of ways. Making your portions bigger than hers. Sneaking extra shirts for you on her clothing ration. You know."

"Damn it, I do *not* know!" cried Morey. "Cherry wouldn't do anything like that!"

Howland looked at him opaquely for a long second. "Of course not," he said at last. "Let's have another drink."

Ruffled, Morey held out his glass. Cherry wasn't the type of girl to *cheat*. Of course she wasn't. A fine, loving girl like her—a pretty girl, of a good family; she wouldn't know how to begin.

HOWLAND was saying, in a sort of chant, "No more budget. No more fights. No more 'Daddy never treated me like this.' No more nagging. No more extra rations for household allowance. No more—Morey, what do you say we go out and have a few drinks? I know a place where—"

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"Sorry, Howland," Morey said. "I've got to get back to the office, you know."

Howland guffawed. He held out his wristwatch. As Morey, a little unsteadily, bent over it, it tinkled out the hour. It was a matter of minutes before the office closed for the day.

"Oh," said Morey. "I didn't realize—Well, anyway, Howland, thanks, but I can't. My wife will be expecting me."

"She certainly will," Howland sniggered. "Won't catch *her* eating up your rations and hers tonight."

Morey said tightly, "Howland!"

"Oh, sorry, sorry." Howland waved an arm. "Don't mean to say anything against *your* wife, of course. Guess maybe Jocelyn soured me on women. But honest, Morey, you'd like this place. Name of Uncle Piggotty's, down in the Old Town. Crazy bunch hangs out there. You'd like them. Couple nights last week they had—I mean, you understand, Morey, I don't go there as often as all that, but I just happened to drop in and—"

Morey interrupted firmly. "Thank you, Howland. Must go home. Wife expects it. Decent of you to offer. Good night. Be seeing you."

He walked out, turned at the door to bow politely, and in turning back cracked the side of his face against the door jamb. A sort of pleasant numbness had taken possession of his entire skin surface, though, and it wasn't until he perceived Henry chattering at him sympathetically that he noticed a trickle of blood running down the side of his face.

"Mere flesh wound," he said with dignity. "Nothing to cause you *least* conshter — consternation, Henry. Now kindly shut your ugly face. Want to think."

And he slept in the car all the way home.

IT was worse than a hangover. The name is "holdover." You've had some drinks; you've started to sober up by catching a little sleep. Then you are required to be awake and to function. The consequent state has the worst features of hangover and intoxication; your head thumps and your mouth tastes like the floor of a bear-pit, but you are nowhere near sober.

There is one cure. Morey said thickly, "Let's have a cocktail, dear."

Cherry was delighted to share a cocktail with him before dinner. Cherry, Morey thought lovingly, was a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful—

He found his head nodding in time to his thoughts and the motion made him wince.

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Cherry flew to his side and touched his temple. "Is it bothering you, darling?" she asked solicitously. "Where you ran into the door, I mean?"

Morey looked at her sharply, but her expression was open and adoring. He said bravely, "Just a little. Nothing to it, really."

The butler brought the cocktails and retired. Cherry lifted her glass. Morey raised his, caught a whiff of the liquor and nearly dropped it. He bit down hard on his churning insides and forced himself to swallow.

He was surprised but grateful: It stayed down. In a moment, the curious phenomenon of warmth began to repeat itself. He swallowed the rest of the drink and held out his glass for a refill. He even tried a smile. Oddly enough, his face didn't fall off.

ONE more drink did it. Morey felt happy and relaxed, but by no means drunk. They went in to dinner in fine spirits. They chatted cheerfully with each other and Henry, and Morey found time to feel sentimentally sorry for poor Howland, who couldn't make a go of his marriage, when marriage was obviously such an easy relationship, so beneficial to both sides, so warm and relaxing . . .

Startled, he said, "What?"

Cherry repeated, "It's the cleverest scheme I ever heard of. Such a funny little man, dear. All kind of *nervous,* if you know what I mean. He kept looking at the door as if he was expecting someone, but of course that was silly. None of his friends would have come to *our* house to see him."

Morey said tensely, "Cherry, *please!* What was that you said about ration stamps?"

"But I told you, darling! It was just after you left this morning. This funny little man came to the door; the butler said he wouldn't give any name. Anyway, I talked to him. I thought he might be a neighbor and I certainly would *never* be rude to any neighbor who might come to call, even if the neighborhood was—"

"The ration stamps!" Morey begged. "Did I hear you say he was peddling phony ration stamps?"

Cherry said uncertainly, "Well, I suppose that in a *way* they're phony. The way he explained it, they weren't the regular official kind. But it was four for one, dear—four of his stamps for one of ours. So I just took out our household book and steamed off a couple of weeks' stamps and—"

"How many?" Morey bellowed.

Cherry blinked. "About—about two weeks' quota," she said faintly. "Was that wrong, dear?"

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MOREY closed his eyes dizzily. "A couple of weeks' stamps," he repeated. "Four for one—you didn't even get the regular rate."

Cherry wailed, "How was I supposed to know? I never had anything like this when I was *home!* We didn't have food riots and slums and all these horrible robots and filthy little revolting men coming to the door!"

Morey stared at her woodenly. She was crying again, but it made no impression on the case-hardened armor that was suddenly thrown around his heart.

Henry made a tentative sound that, in a human, would have been a preparatory cough, but Morey froze him with a white-eyed look.

Morey said in a dreary monotone that barely penetrated the sound of Cherry's tears, "Let me tell you just what it was you did. Assuming, at best, that these stamps you got are at least average good counterfeits, and not so bad that the best thing to do with them is throw them away before we get caught with them in our possession, you have approximately a two-month supply of funny stamps. In case you didn't know it, those ration books are not merely ornamental. They have to be turned in every month to prove that we have completed our consuming quota for the month.

"When they are turned in, they are spot-checked. Every book is at least glanced at. A big chunk of them are gone over very carefully by the inspectors, and a certain percentage are tested by ultra-violet, infra-red, X-ray, radioisotopes, bleaches, fumes, paper chromatography and every other damned test known to Man." His voice was rising to an uneven crescendo. "*If* we are lucky enough to get away with using any of these stamps at all, we daren't—we simply *dare* not—use more than one or two counterfeits to every dozen or more real stamps.

"That means, Cherry, that what you bought is not a two-month supply, but maybe a two-*year* supply—and since, as you no doubt have never noticed, the things have expiration dates on them, there is probably no chance in the world that we can ever hope to use more than half of them." He was bellowing by the time he pushed back his chair and towered over her. "Moreover," he went on, "right *now,* right as of this *minute,* we have to make up the stamps you gave away, which means that at the very best we are going to be on double rations for two weeks or so.

"And that says nothing about the one feature of this whole grisly mess that you seem to have

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thought of least, namely that counterfeit stamps are against the *law!* I'm poor, Cherry; I live in a slum, and I know it; I've got a long way to go before I'm as rich or respected or powerful as your father, about whom I am beginning to get considerably tired of hearing. But poor as I may be, I can tell you *this* for sure: Up until now, at any rate, I have been *honest.*"

Cherry's tears had stopped entirely and she was bowed white-faced and dry-eyed by the time Morey had finished. He had spent himself; there was no violence left in him.

He stared dismally at Cherry for a moment, then turned wordlessly and stamped out of the house.

Marriage! he thought as he left.

HE walked for hours, blind to where he was going.

What brought him back to awareness was a sensation he had not felt in a dozen years. It was not, Morey abruptly realized, the dying traces of his hangover that made his stomach feel so queer. He was hungry—actually hungry.

He looked about him. He was in the Old Town, miles from home, jostled by crowds of lower-class people. The block he was on was as atrocious a slum as Morey had ever seen—Chinese pagodas stood next to rococo imitations of the chapels around Versailles; gingerbread marred every facade; no building was without its brilliant signs and flarelights.

He saw a blindingly over-decorated eating establishment called Billie's Budget Busy Bee and crossed the street toward it, dodging through the unending streams of traffic. It was a miserable excuse for a restaurant, but Morey was in no mood to care. He found a seat under a potted palm, as far from the tinkling fountains and robot string ensemble as he could manage, and ordered recklessly, paying no attention to the ration prices. As the waiter was gliding noiselessly away, Morey had a sickening realization: He'd come out without his ration book. He groaned out loud; it was too late to leave without causing a disturbance. But then, he thought rebelliously, what difference did one more unrationed meal make, anyhow?

Food made him feel a little better. He finished the last of his *profiterole au chocolate,* not even leaving on the plate the uneaten one-third that tradition permitted, and paid his check. The robot cashier reached automatically for his ration book. Morey had a moment of grandeur as he said simply, "No ration stamps."

Robot cashiers are not equipped

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to display surprise, but this one tried. The man behind Morey in line audibly caught his breath, and less audibly mumbled something about *slummers*. Morey took it as a compliment and strode outside feeling almost in good humor.

Good enough to go home to Cherry? Morey thought seriously of it for a second; but he wasn't going to pretend he was wrong and certainly Cherry wasn't going to be willing to admit that *she* was at fault.

Besides, Morey told himself grimly, she was undoubtedly asleep. That was an annoying thing about Cherry at best: she never had any trouble getting to sleep. Didn't even use her quota of sleeping tablets, though Morey had spoken to her about it more than once. Of course, he reminded himself, he had been so polite and tactful about it, as befits a newlywed, that very likely she hadn't even understood that it was a complaint. Well, *that* would stop!

Man's man Morey Fry, wearing no collar ruff but his own, strode determinedly down the streets of the Old Town.

"HEY, Joe, want a good time?" Morey took one unbelieving look. "You again!" he roared.

The little man stared at him in genuine surprise. Then a faint glimmer of recognition crossed his face. "Oh, yeah," he said. "This morning, huh?" He clucked commiseratingly. "Too bad you wouldn't deal with me. Your wife was a lot smarter. Of course, you got me a little sore, Jack, so naturally I had to raise the price a little bit."

"You skunk, you cheated my poor wife blind! You and I are going to the local station house and talk this over."

The little man pursed his lips. "We are, huh?"

Morey nodded vigorously. "Damn right! And let me tell you—" He stopped in the middle of a threat as a large hand cupped around his shoulder.

The equally large man who owned the hand said, in a mild and cultured voice, "Is this gentleman disturbing you, Sam?"

"Not so far," the little man conceded. "He might want to, though, so don't go away."

Morey wrenched his shoulder away. "Don't think you can strongarm me. I'm taking you to the police."

Sam shook his head unbelievingly. "You mean you're going to call the law in on this?"

"I certainly am!"

Sam sighed regretfully. "What do you think of that, Walter? Treating his wife like that. Such a nice lady, too."

"What are you talking about?"

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Morey demanded, stung on a peculiarly sensitive spot.

"I'm talking about your wife," Sam explained. "Of course, I'm not married myself. But it seems to me that if I was, I wouldn't call the police when my wife was engaged in some kind of criminal activity or other. No, sir, I'd try to settle it myself. Tell you what," he advised, "why don't you talk this over with her? Make her see the error of—"

"Wait a minute," Morey interrupted. "You mean you'd involve my wife in this thing?"

The man spread his hands helplessly. "It's not me that would involve her, Buster," he said. "She already involved her own self. It takes two to make a crime, you know. I sell, maybe; I won't deny it. But after all, I can't sell unless somebody buys, can I?"

Morey stared at him glumly. He glanced in quick speculation at the large-sized Walter; but Walter was just as big as he'd remembered, so that took care of that. Violence was out; the police were out; that left no really attractive way of capitalizing on the good luck of running into the man again.

SAM said, "Well, I'm glad to see that's off your mind. Now, returning to my original question, Mac, how would you like a good time? You look like a smart fellow to me; you look like you'd be kind of interested in a place I happen to know of down the block."

Morey said bitterly, "So you're a dive-steerer, too. A real talented man."

"I admit it," Sam agreed. "Stamp business is slow at night, in my experience. People have their minds more on a good time. And, believe me, a good time is what I can show 'em. Take this place I'm talking about, Uncle Piggotty's is the name of it, it's what I would call an unusual kind of place. Wouldn't you say so, Walter?"

"Oh, I agree with you entirely," Walter rumbled.

But Morey was hardly listening. He said, "Uncle Piggotty's, you say?"

"That's right," said Sam.

Morey frowned for a moment, digesting an idea. Uncle Piggotty's sounded like the place Howland had been talking about back at the plant; it might be interesting, at that.

While he was making up his mind, Sam slipped an arm through his on one side and Walter amiably wrapped a big hand around the other. Morey found himself walking.

"You'll like it," Sam promised comfortably. "No hard feelings about this morning, sport?

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Of course not. Once you get a look at Piggotty's, you'll get over your mad, anyhow. It's something special. I swear, on what they pay me for bringing in customers, I wouldn't do it unless I *believed* in it."

"Dance, Jack?" the hostess yelled over the noise at the bar. She stepped back, lifted her flounced skirts to ankle height and executed a tricky nine-step.

"My name is Morey," Morey yelled back. "And I don't want to dance, thanks."

The hostess shrugged, frowned meaningfully at Sam and danced away.

Sam flagged the bartender. "First round's on us," he explained to Morey. "Then we won't bother you any more. Unless you want us to, of course. Like the place?" Morey hesitated, but Sam didn't wait. "Fine place," he yelled, and picked up the drink the bartender left him. "See you around."

He and the big man were gone. Morey stared after them uncertainly, then gave it up. He was here, anyhow; might as well at least have a drink. He ordered and looked around.

UNCLE PIGGOTTY'S was a third-rate dive disguised to look, in parts of it at least, like one of the exclusive upper-class country clubs. The bar, for instance, was treated to resemble the clean lines of nailed wood; but underneath the surface treatment, Morey could detect the intricate laminations of plyplastic. What at first glance appeared to be burlap hangings were in actuality elaborately textured synthetics. And all through the bar the motif was carried out.

A floor show of sorts was going on, but nobody seemed to be paying much attention to it. Morey, straining briefly to hear the master of ceremonies, gathered that the wit was on a more than mildly vulgar level. There was a dispirited string of chorus beauties in long ruffled pantaloons and diaphanous tops; one of them, Morey was almost sure, was the hostess who had talked to him just a few moments before.

Next to him a man was declaiming to a middle-aged woman:

"Smote I the monstrous rock, yahoo!
Smote I the turgid tube, Bully Boy!
Smote I the cankered hill—

Why, Morey!" he interrupted himself. "What are you doing here?"

He turned farther around and Morey recognized him. "Hello, Howland," he said. "I—uh—I happened to be free tonight, so I thought—"

Howland sniggered. "Well,

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guess your wife is more liberal than mine was. Order a drink, boy."

"Thanks, I've got one," said Morey.

The woman, with a tigerish look at Morey, said, "Don't stop, Everett. That was one of your most beautiful things."

"Oh, Morey's heard my poetry," Howland said. "Morey, I'd like you to meet a very lovely and talented young lady, Tanaquil Bigelow. Morey works in the office with me, Tan."

"Obviously," said Tanaquil Bigelow in a frozen voice, and Morey hastily withdrew the hand he had begun to put out.

The conversation stuck there, impaled, the woman cold, Howland relaxed and abstracted, Morey wondering if, after all, this had been such a good idea. He caught the eye-cell of the robot bartender and ordered a round of drinks for the three of them, politely putting them on Howland's ration book. By the time the drinks had come and Morey had just got around to deciding that it wasn't a very good idea, the woman had all of a sudden become thawed.

She said abruptly, "You look like the kind of man who *thinks*, Morey, and I like to talk to that kind of man. Frankly, Morey, I just don't have any patience at all with the stupid, stodgy men who just work in their offices all day and eat all their dinners every night, and gad about and consume like mad and where does it all get them, anyhow? That's right, I can see you understand. Just one crazy rush of consume, consume from the day you're born *plop* to the day you're buried *pop!* And who's to blame if not the robots?"

FAINTLY, a tinge of worry began to appear on the surface of Howland's relaxed calm. "Tan," he chided, "Morey may not be very interested in politics."

Politics, Morey thought; well, at least that was a clue. He'd had the dizzying feeling, while the woman was talking, that he himself was the ball in the games machine he had designed for the shop earlier that day. Following the woman's conversation might, at that, give his next design some valuable pointers in swoops, curves and obstacles.

He said, with more than half truth, "No, please go on, Miss Bigelow. I'm very much interested."

She smiled; then abruptly her face changed to a frightening scowl. Morey flinched, but evidently the scowl wasn't meant for him. "Robots!" she hissed. "Supposed to work for us, aren't they? Hah! We're their slaves,

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slaves for every moment of every miserable day of our lives. Slaves! Wouldn't you like to join us and be free, Morey?"

Morey took cover in his drink. He made an expressive gesture with his free hand—expressive of exactly what, he didn't truly know, for he was lost. But it seemed to satisfy the woman.

She said accusingly, "Did you know that more than three-quarters of the people in this country have had a nervous breakdown in the past five years and four months? That more than half of them are under the constant care of psychiatrists for psychosis—not just plain ordinary neurosis like my husband's got and Howland here has got and you've got, but psychosis. Like I've got. Did you know that? Did you know that forty per cent of the population are essentially manic depressive, thirty-one per cent are schizoid, thirty-eight per cent have an assortment of other unfixed psychogenic disturbances and twenty-four—"

"Hold it a minute, Tan," Howland interrupted critically. "You've got too many per cents there. Start over again."

"Oh, the hell with it," the woman said moodily. "I wish my husband were here. He expresses it so much better than I do." She swallowed her drink. "Since you've wriggled off the hook," she said nastily to Morey, "how about setting up another round—on my ration book this time?"

Morey did; it was the simplest thing to do in his confusion. When that was gone, they had another on Howland's book.

AS near as he could figure out, the woman, her husband and quite possibly Howland as well belonged to some kind of anti-robot group. Morey had heard of such things; they had a quasi-legal status, neither approved nor prohibited, but he had never come into contact with them before. Remembering the hatred he had so painfully relived at the psychodrama session, he thought anxiously that perhaps he belonged with them. But, question them though he might, he couldn't seem to get the principles of the organization firmly in mind.

The woman finally gave up trying to explain it, and went off to find her husband while Morey and Howland had another drink and listened to two drunks squabble over who bought the next round. They were at the Alphonse-Gaston stage of inebriation; they would regret it in the morning, for each was bending over backward to permit the other to pay the ration points. Morey wondered uneasily about his own points; Howland was certainly getting credit for a lot

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of Morey's drinking tonight. Served him right for forgetting his book, of course.

When the woman came back, it was with the large man Morey had encountered in the company of Sam, the counterfeiter, steerer and general man about Old Town.

"A remarkably small world, isn't it?" boomed Walter Bigelow, only slightly crushing Morey's hand in his. "Well, sir, my wife has told me how interested you are in the basic philosophical drives behind our movement, and I should like to discuss them further with you. To begin with, sir, have you considered the principle of Twoness?"

Morey said, "Why—"

"Very good," said Bigelow courteously. He cleared his throat and declaimed:

"Han-headed Cathay saw it first,
Bright as brightest solar burst;
Whipped it into boy and girl,
The blinding spiral-sliced swirl:
Yang
And Yin."

He shrugged deprecatingly. "Just the first stanza," he said. "I don't know if you got much out of it."

"Well, no," Morey admitted.

"Second stanza," Bigelow said firmly:

"Hegel saw it, saw it clear;
Jackal Marx drew near, drew near:
O'er his shoulder saw it plain,
Turned it upside down again:
Yang
And Yin."

There was an expectant pause. Morey said, "I—uh—"

"Wraps it all up, doesn't it?" Bigelow's wife demanded. "Oh, if only others could see it as clearly as you do! The robot peril *and* the robot savior. Starvation *and* surfeit. Always twoness, always!"

BIGELOW patted Morey's shoulder. "The next stanza makes it even clearer," he said. "It's really very clever — I shouldn't say it, of course, but it's Howland's as much as it's mine. He helped me with the verses." Morey darted a glance at Howland, but Howland was carefully looking away. "Third stanza," said Bigelow. "This is a hard one, because it's long, so pay attention."

Justice, tip your sightless scales;
One pan rises, one pan falls.

Howland," he interrupted himself, "are you *sure* about that rhyme? I always trip over it. Well, anyway:

Add to A and B grows less;
A's B's partner, nonetheless.
Next, the Twoness that there be
In even electricity.
Chart the current as it's found:
Sine the hot lead, line the ground.
The wild sine dances, soars and falls,

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But only to figures the zero calls.
Sine wave, scales, all things that be
Share a reciprocity.
Male and female, light and dark:
Name the numbers of Noah's Ark!
Yang
And Yin!"

"Dearest!" shrieked Bigelow's wife. "You've never done it better!" There was a spatter of applause, and Morey realized for the first time that half the bar had stopped its noisy revel to listen to them. Bigelow was evidently quite a well-known figure here.

Morey said weakly, "I've never heard anything like it."

He turned hesitantly to Howland, who promptly said, "Drink! What we all need right now is a drink."

They had a drink on Bigelow's book.

Morey got Howland aside and asked him, "Look, level with me. Are these people nuts?"

Howland showed pique. "No. Certainly not."

"Does that poem mean anything? Does this whole business of twoness mean anything?"

Howland shrugged. "If it means something to them, it means something. They're philosophers, Morey. They see deep into things. You don't know what a privilege it is for me to be allowed to associate with them."

They had another drink. On Howland's book, of course.

MOREY eased Walter Bigelow over to a quiet spot. He said, "Leaving twoness out of it for the moment, what's this about the robots?"

Bigelow looked at him round-eyed. "Didn't you understand the poem?"

"Of course I did. But diagram it for me in simple terms so I can tell my wife."

Bigelow beamed. "It's about the dichotomy of robots," he explained. "Like the little salt mill that the boy wished for: it ground out salt and ground out salt and ground out salt. He had to have salt, but not *that* much salt. Whitehead explains it clearly—"

They had another drink on Bigelow's book.

Morey wavered over Tanaquil Bigelow. He said fuzzily, "Listen. Mrs. Walter Tanquil Strongarm Bigelow. Listen."

She grinned smugly at him. "Brown hair," she said dreamily.

Morey shook his head vigorously. "Never mind hair," he ordered. "Never mind poem. Listen. In *pre-cise* and el-e-*men*-ta-ry terms, explain to me what is wrong with the world today."

"Not enough brown hair," she said promptly.

"Never mind hair!"

"All-right," she said agreeably. "Too many robots. Too many robots make too much of everything."

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"Ha! Got it!" Morey exclaimed triumphantly. "Get rid of robots!"

"Oh, no. No! No! No. We wouldn't eat. Everything is mechanized. Can't get rid of them, can't slow down production—slowing down is dying, stopping is quicker dying. Principle of twoness is the concept that clarifies all these—"

"No!" Morey said violently. "What should we *do?*"

"Do? I'll tell you what we should do, if that's what you want. I can tell you."

"Then tell me."

"What we should do is—" Tanaquil hiccupped with a look of refined consternation—"have another drink."

They had another drink. He gallantly let her pay, of course. She ungallantly argued with the bartender about the ration points due her.

THOUGH not a two-fisted drinker, Morey tried. He really worked at it.

He paid the price, too. For some little time before his limbs stopped moving, his mind stopped functioning. Blackout. Almost a blackout, at any rate, for all he retained of the late evening was a kaleidoscope of people and places and things. Howland was there, drunk as a skunk, disgracefully drunk, Morey remembered thinking as he stared up at Howland from the floor. The Bigelows were there. His wife Cherry, solicitous and amused, was there. And oddly enough, Henry was there.

It was very, very hard to reconstruct. Morey devoted a whole morning's hangover to the effort. It was *important* to reconstruct it, for some reason. But Morey couldn't even remember what the reason was; and finally he dismissed it, guessing that he had either solved the secret of twoness or whether Tanaquil Bigelow's remarkable figure was natural.

He did, however, know that the next morning he had waked in his own bed, with no recollection of getting there. No recollection of anything much, at least not of anything that fit into the proper chronological order or seemed to mesh with anything else, after the dozenth drink when he and Howland, arms around each other's shoulders, composed a new verse on twoness and, plagiarizing an old marching tune, howled it across the boisterous barroom:

"A twoness on the scene much later
Rests in your refrigerator.
Heat your house and insulate it.
Next your food: Refrigerate it.
Frost will damp your Freon coils,
So flux in nichrome till it boils.
See the picture? Heat in cold
In heat in cold, the story's told!

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Giant-writ the sacred scrawl:
Oh, the twoness of it all!
Yang
And Yin!"

It had, at any rate, seemed to mean something at the time.

If alcohol opened Morey's eyes to the fact there *was* a twoness, perhaps alcohol was what he needed. For there was.

Call it a dichotomy, if the word seems more couth. A kind of two-pronged struggle, the struggle of two unwearying runners in an immortal race. There is the refrigerator inside the house. The cold air, the bubble of heated air that is the house, the bubble of cooled air that is the refrigerator, the momentary bubble of heated air that defrosts it. Call the heat Yang, if you will. Call the cold Yin. Yang overtakes Yin. Then Yin passes Yang. Then Yang passes Yin. Then—

Give them other names. Call Yin a mouth; call Yang a hand.

If the hand rests, the mouth will starve. If the mouth stops, the hand will die. The hand, Yang, moves faster.

Yin may not lag behind.

Then call Yang a robot.

And remember that a pipeline has two ends.

LIKE any once-in-a-lifetime lush, Morey braced himself for the consequences—and found startledly that there were none.

Cherry was a surprise to him. "You were so funny," she giggled. "And, honestly, so *romantic.*"

He shakily swallowed his breakfast coffee.

The office staff roared and slapped him on the back. "Howland tells us you're living high, boy!" they bellowed more or less in the same words. "Hey, listen to what Morey did—went on the town for the night of a lifetime *and didn't even bring his ration book along to cash in!*"

They thought it was a wonderful joke.

But, then, everything was going well. Cherry, it seemed, had reformed out of recognition. True, she still hated to go out in the evening and Morey never saw her forcing herself to gorge on unwanted food or play undesired games. But, moping into the pantry one afternoon, he found to his incredulous delight that they were well ahead of their ration quotas. In some items, in fact, they were *out*—a month's supply and more was gone ahead of schedule!

Nor was it the counterfeit stamps, for he had found them tucked behind a bain-marie and quietly burned them. He cast about for ways of complimenting her, but caution prevailed. She was sensitive on the subject; leave it be.

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And virtue had its reward.

Wainwright called him in, all smiles. "Morey, great news! We've all appreciated your work here and we've been able to show it in some more tangible way than compliments. I didn't want to say anything till it was definite, but—your status has been reviewed by Classification and the Ration Board. You're out of Class Four Minor, Morey!"

Morey said tremulously, hardly daring to hope, "I'm a full Class Four?"

"Class Five, Morey. *Class Five!* When we do something, we do it right. We asked for a special waiver and got it—you've skipped a whole class." He added honestly, "Not that it was just our backing that did it, of course. Your own recent splendid record of consumption helped a lot. I told you you could do it!"

Morey had to sit down. He missed the rest of what Wainwright had to say, but it couldn't have mattered. He escaped from the office, sidestepped the knot of fellow-employees waiting to congratulate him, and got to a phone.

CHERRY was as ecstatic and inarticulate as he. "Oh, darling!" was all she could say.

"And I couldn't have done it without you," he babbled. "Wainwright as much as said so himself. Said if it wasn't for the way we—well, *you* have been keeping up with the rations, it never would have got by the Board. I've been meaning to say something to you about that, dear, but I just haven't known how. But I do appreciate it. I—Hello?" There was a curious silence at the other end of the phone. "Hello?" he repeated worriedly.

Cherry's voice was intense and low. "Morey Fry, I think you're mean. I wish you hadn't spoiled the good news." And she hung up.

Morey stared slack-jawed at the phone.

Howland appeared behind him, chuckling. "Women," he said. "Never try to figure them. Anyway, congratulations, Morey."

"Thanks," Morey mumbled.

Howland coughed and said, "Uh—by the way, Morey, now that you're one of the big shots, so to speak, you won't—uh—feel obliged to—well, say anything to Wainwright, for instance, about anything I may have said while we—"

"Excuse me," Morey said, unhearing, and pushed past him. He thought wildly of calling Cherry back, of racing home to see just what he'd said that was wrong. Not that there was much doubt, of course. He'd touched her on her sore point.

Anyway, his wristwatch was chiming a reminder of the fact

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that his psychiatric appointment for the week was coming up.

Morey sighed. The day gives and the day takes away. Blessed is the day that gives only good things.

If any.

THE session went badly. Many of the sessions had been going badly, Morey decided; there had been more and more whispering in knots of doctors from which he was excluded, poking and probing in the dark instead of the precise psychic surgery he was used to. Something was wrong, he thought.

Something was. Semmelweiss confirmed it when he adjourned the group session. After the other doctor had left, he sat Morey down for a private talk. On his own time, too—he didn't ask for his usual ration fee. That told Morey how important the problem was.

"Morey," said Semmelweiss, "you're holding back."

"I don't mean to, Doctor," Morey said earnestly.

"Who knows what you 'mean' to do? Part of you 'means' to. We've dug pretty deep and we've found some important things. Now there's something I can't put my finger on. Exploring the mind, Morey, is like sending scouts through cannibal territory. You can't see the cannibals—until it's too late. But if you send a scout through the jungle and he doesn't show up on the other side, it's a fair assumption that something obstructed his way. In that case, we would label the obstruction 'cannibals.' In the case of the human mind, we label the obstruction a 'trauma.' What the trauma is, or what its effects on behavior will be, we have to find out, once we know that it's there."

Morey nodded. All of this was familiar; he couldn't see what Semmelweiss was driving at.

Semmelweiss sighed. "The trouble with healing traumas and penetrating psychic blocks and releasing inhibitions—the trouble with everything we psychiatrists do, in fact, is that we can't afford to do it too well. An inhibited man is under a strain. We try to relieve the strain. But if we succeed completely, leaving him with no inhibitions at all, we have an outlaw, Morey. Inhibitions are often socially necessary. Suppose, for instance, that an average man were not inhibited against blatant waste. It could happen, you know. Suppose that instead of consuming his ration quota in an orderly and responsible way, he did such things as set fire to his house and everything in it or dumped his food allotment in the river.

"When only a few individuals are doing it, we treat the indivi-

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duals. But if it were done on a mass scale, Morey, it would be the end of society as we know it. Think of the whole collection of anti-social actions that you see in every paper. Man beats wife; wife turns into a harpy; junior smashes up windows; husband starts a black-market stamp racket. And every one of them traces to a basic weakness in the mind's defenses against the most important single anti-social phenomenon—failure to consume."

Morey flared, "That's not fair, Doctor! That was weeks ago! We've certainly been on the ball lately. I was just commended by the Board, in fact—"

The doctor said mildly, "Why so violent, Morey? I only made a general remark."

"It's just natural to resent being accused."

The doctor shrugged. "First, foremost and above all, we do *not* accuse patients of things. We try to help you find things out." He lit his end-of-session cigarette. "Think about it, please. I'll see you next week."

CHERRY was composed and unapproachable. She kissed him remotely when he came in. She said, "I called Mother and told her the good news. She and Dad promised to come over here to celebrate."

"Yeah," said Morey. "Darling, what did I say wrong on the phone?"

"They'll be here about six."

"Sure. But what did I say? Was it about the rations? If you're sensitive, I swear I'll never mention them again."

"I *am* sensitive, Morey."

He said despairingly, "I'm sorry. I just—"

He had a better idea. He kissed her.

Cherry was passive at first, but not for long. When he had finished kissing her, she pushed him away and actually giggled. "Let me get dressed for dinner."

"Certainly. Anyway, I was just—"

She laid a finger on his lips.

He let her escape and, feeling much less tense, drifted into the library. The afternoon papers were waiting for him. Virtuously, he sat down and began going through them in order. Midway through the *World-Telegram-Sun-Post-and-News,* he rang for Henry.

Morey had read clear through to the drama section of the *Times-Herald-Tribune-Mirror* before the robot appeared. "Good evening," it said politely.

"What took you so long?" Morey demanded. "Where are all the robots?"

Robots do not stammer, but there was a distinct pause before Henry said, "Belowstairs, sir.

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Did you want them for something?"

"Well, no. I just haven't seen them around. Get me a drink."

It hesitated. "Scotch, sir?"

"*Before* dinner? Get me a Manhattan."

"We're all out of Vermouth, sir."

"All out? Would you mind telling me how?"

"It's all used up, sir."

"Now that's just ridiculous," Morey snapped. "We have never run out of liquor in our whole lives and you know it. Good heavens, we just got our allotment in the other day and I certainly—"

He checked himself. There was a sudden flicker of horror in his eyes as he stared at Henry.

"You certainly what, sir?" the robot prompted.

Morey swallowed. "Henry, did I—did I do something I shouldn't have?"

"I'm sure I wouldn't know, sir. It isn't up to me to say what you should and shouldn't do."

"Of course not," Morey agreed grayly.

He sat rigid, staring hopelessly into space, remembering. What he remembered was no pleasure to him at all.

"Henry," he said. "Come along, we're going belowstairs. Right now!"

IT had been Tanaquil Bigelow's remark about the robots. *Too many robots—make too much of everything.*

That had implanted the idea; it germinated in Morey's home. More than a little drunk, less than ordinarily inhibited, he had found the problem clear and the answer obvious.

He stared around him in dismal worry. His own robots, following his own orders, given weeks before . . .

Henry said, "It's just what you *told* us to do, sir."

Morey groaned. He was watching a scene of unparalleled activity, and it sent shivers up and down his spine.

There was the butler-robot, hard at work, his copper face expressionless. Dressed in Morey's own sports knickers and golfing shoes, the robot solemnly hit a ball against the wall, picked it up and teed it, hit it again, over and again, with Morey's own clubs. Until the ball wore ragged and was replaced; and the shafts of the clubs leaned out of true; and the close-stitched seams in the clothing began to stretch and abrade.

"My God!" said Morey hollowly.

There were the maid-robots, exquisitely dressed in Cherry's best, walking up and down in the delicate, slim shoes, sitting and

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rising and bending and turning. The cook-robots and the serving-robots were preparing dionysian meals.

Morey swallowed. "You—you've been doing this right along," he said to Henry. "That's why the quotas have been filled."

"Oh, yes, sir. Just as you told us."

Morey had to sit down. One of the serving-robots politely scurried over with a chair, brought from upstairs for their new chores.

Waste.

Morey tasted the word between his lips.

Waste.

You never wasted things. You *used* them. If necessary, you drove yourself to the edge of breakdown to use them; you made every breath a burden and every hour a torment to use them, until through diligent consuming and/or occupational merit, you were promoted to the next higher class, and were allowed to consume less frantically. But you

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didn't wantonly destroy or throw out. You *consumed.*

Morey thought fearfully: When the Board finds out about this . . .

Still, he reminded himself, the Board hadn't found out. It might take some time before they did, for humans, after all, never entered robot quarters. There was no law against it, not ever a sacrosanct custom. But there was no reason to. When breaks occurred, which was infrequently, maintenance robots or repair squads came in and put them back in order. Usually the humans involved didn't even know it had happened, because the robots used their own TBR radio circuits and the process was next thing to automatic.

Morey said reprovingly, "Henry, you should have told—well, I mean reminded me about this."

"But, sir!" Henry protested. "'Don't tell a living soul,' you said. You made it a direct order."

"Umph. Well, keep it that way. I—uh—I have to go back upstairs. Better get the rest of the robots started on dinner."

Morey left, not comfortably.

THE dinner to celebrate Morey's promotion was difficult.

Morey liked Cherry's parents. Old Elon, after the pre-marriage inquisition that father must inevitably give to daughter's suitor, had buckled right down to the job of adjustment. The old folks were good about not interfering, good about keeping their superior social status to themselves, good about helping out on the budget —at least once a week, they could be relied on to come over for a hearty meal, and Mrs. Elon had more than once remade some of Cherry's new dresses to fit herself, even to the extent of wearing all the high-point ornamentation.

And they had been wonderful about the wedding gifts, when Morey and their daughter got married. The most any member of Morey's family had been willing to take was a silver set or a few crystal table pieces. The Elons had come through with a dazzling promise to accept a car, a bird-bath for their garden and a complete set of living-room furniture! Of course, they could afford it—they had to consume so little that it wasn't much strain for them even to take gifts of that magnitude. But without their help, Morey knew, the first few months of matrimony would have been even tougher consuming than they were.

But on this particular night it was hard for Morey to like anyone. He responded with monosyllables; he barely grunted when Elon proposed a toast to his promotion and his brilliant future. He was preoccupied.

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Rightly so. Morey, in his deepest, bravest searching, could find no clue in his memory as to just what the punishment might be for what he had done. But he had a sick certainty that trouble lay ahead.

Morey went over his problem so many times that an anesthesia set in. By the time dinner was ended and he and his father-in-law were in the den with their brandy, he was more or less functioning again.

Elon, for the first time since Morey had known him, offered Morey one of *his* cigars. "You're Grade Five—can afford to smoke somebody else's now, hey?"

"Yeah," Morey said glumly.

There was a moment of silence. Then Elon, as punctilious as any companion-robot, coughed and tried again. "Remember being peaked till I hit Grade Five," he reminisced meaningfully. "Consuming keeps a man on the go, all right. Things piled up at the law office, couldn't be taken care of while ration points piled up, too. And consuming comes first, of course—that's a citizen's prime duty. Mother and I had our share of grief over that, but a couple that wants to make a go of marriage and citizenship just pitches in and does the job, hey?"

Morey repressed a shudder and managed to nod.

"Best thing about upgrading," Elon went on, as if he had elicited a satisfactory answer, "don't have to spend so much time consuming, give more attention to work. Greatest luxury in the world, work. Wish I had as much stamina as you young fellows. Five days a week in court are about all I can manage. Hit six for a while, relaxed first time in my life, but my doctor made me cut down. Said we can't overdo pleasures. You'll be working two days a week now, hey?"

Morey produced another nod.

ELON drew deeply on his cigar, his eyes bright as they watched Morey. He was visibly puzzled, and Morey, even in his half-daze, could recognize the exact moment at which Elon drew the wrong inference. "Ah, everything okay with you and Cherry?" he asked diplomatically.

"Fine!" Morey exclaimed. "Couldn't be better!"

"Good. Good." Elon changed the subject with almost an audible wrench. "Speaking of court, had an interesting case the other day. Young fellow—year or two younger than you, I guess—came in with a Section Ninety-seven on him. Know what that is? Breaking and entering!"

"Breaking and entering," Morey repeated wonderingly, interested in spite of himself. "Breaking and entering what?"

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"Houses. Old term; law's full of them. Originally applied to stealing things. Still does, I discovered."

"You mean he *stole* something?" Morey asked in bewilderment.

"Exactly! He *stole*. Strangest thing I ever came across. Talked it over with one of his bunch of lawyers later; new one on him, too. Seems this kid had a girl friend, nice kid but a little, you know, plump. She got interested in art."

"There's nothing wrong with that," Morey said.

"Nothing wrong with her, either. She didn't do anything. She didn't like him too much, though. Wouldn't marry him. Kid got to thinking about how he could get her to change her mind and—well, you know that big Mondrian in the Museum?"

"I've never been there," Morey said, somewhat embarrassed.

"Um. Ought to try it some day, boy. Anyway, comes closing time at the Museum the other day, this kid sneaks in. He steals the painting. That's right—*steals* it. Takes it to give to the girl."

Morey shook his head blankly. "I never heard of anything like that in my life."

"Not many have. Girl wouldn't take it, by the way. Got scared when he brought it to her. She must've tipped off the police, I guess. Somebody did. Took 'em three hours to find it, even when they knew it was hanging on a wall. Pretty poor kid. Forty-two room house."

"And there was a *law* against it?" Morey asked. "I mean it's like making a law against breathing."

"Certainly was. Old law, of course. Kid got set back two grades. Would have been more but, my God, he was only a Grade Three as it was."

"Yeah," said Morey, wetting his lips. "Say, Dad—"

"Um?"

Morey cleared his throat. "Uh—I wonder—I mean what's the penalty, for instance, for things like—well, misusing rations or anything like that?"

Elon's eyebrows went high. "Misusing rations?"

"Say you had a liquor ration, it might be, and instead of drinking it, you—well, flushed it down the drain or something . . ."

His voice trailed off. Elon was frowning. He said, "Funny thing, seems I'm not as broadminded as I thought I was. For some reason, I don't find that amusing."

"Sorry," Morey croaked.

And he certainly was.

IT might be dishonest, but it was doing him a lot of good, for days went by and no one seemed to have penetrated his

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secret. Cherry was happy. Wainwright found occasion after occasion to pat Morey's back. The wages of sin were turning out to be prosperity and happiness.

There was a bad moment when Morey came home to find Cherry in the middle of supervising a team of packing-robots; the new house, suitable to his higher grade, was ready, and they were expected to move in the next day. But Cherry hadn't been below-stairs, and Morey had his household robots clean up the evidences of what they had been doing before the packers got that far.

The new house was, by Morey's standards, pure luxury.

It was only fifteen rooms. Morey had shrewdly retained one more robot than was required for a Class Five, and had been allowed a compensating deduction in the size of his house.

The robot quarters were less secluded than in the old house, though, and that was a disadvantage. More than once Cherry had snuggled up to him in the delightful intimacy of their one bed in their single bedroom and said, with faint curiosity, "I wish they'd stop that noise." And Morey had promised to speak to Henry about it in the morning. But there was nothing he could say to Henry, of course, unless he ordered Henry to stop the tireless consuming through each of the day's twenty-four hours that kept them always ahead, but never quite far enough ahead, of the inexorable weekly increment of ration quotas.

But, though Cherry might once in a while have a moment's curiosity about what the robots were doing, she was not likely to be able to guess at the facts. Her upbringing was, for once, on Morey's side—she knew so little of the grind, grind, grind of consuming that was the lot of the lower classes that she scarcely noticed that there was less of it.

Morey almost, sometimes, relaxed.

He thought of many ingenious chores for the robots, and the robots politely and emotionlessly obeyed.

Morey was a success.

It wasn't all gravy. There was a nervous moment for Morey when the quarterly survey report came in the mail. As the day for the Ration Board to check over the degree of wear on the turned-in discards came due, Morey began to sweat. The clothing and furniture and household goods the robots had consumed for him were very nearly in shreds. It had to look plausible, that was the big thing—no normal person would wear a hole completely through the knee of a pair of pants, as Henry had done with his dress suit before Morey stop-

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ped him. Would the Board question it?

Worse, was there something about the *way* the robots consumed the stuff that would give the whole show away? Some special wear point in the robot anatomy, for instance, that would rub a hole where no human's body could, or stretch a seam that should normally be under no strain at all?

It was worrisome. But the worry was needless. When the report of survey came, Morey let out a long-held breath. *Not a single item disallowed!*

Morey was a success—and so was his scheme!

TO the successful man come the rewards of success. Morey arrived home one evening after a hard day's work at the office and was alarmed to find another car parked in his drive. It was a tiny two-seater, the sort affected by top officials and the very well-to-do.

Right then and there Morey learned the first half of the embezzlers' lesson: Anything different is dangerous. He came uneasily into his own home, fearful that some high officer of the Ration Board had come to ask questions.

But Cherry was glowing. "Mr. Porfirio is a newspaper feature writer and he wants to write you up for their 'Consumers of Distinction' page! Morey, I *couldn't* be more proud!"

"Thanks," said Morey glumly. "Hello."

Mr. Porfirio shook Morey's hand warmly. "I'm not exactly from a newspaper," he corrected. "Trans-video Press is what it is, actually. We're a news wire service; we supply forty-seven hundred papers with news and feature material. Every one of them," he added complacently, "on the required consumption list of Grades One through Six inclusive. We have a Sunday supplement self-help feature on consuming problems and we like to—well, give credit where credit is due. You've established an enviable record, Mr. Fry. We'd like to tell our readers about it."

"Um," said Morey. "Let's go in the drawing room."

"Oh, no!" Cherry said firmly. "I want to hear this. He's so modest, Mr. Porfirio, you'd really never know what kind of a man he is just to listen to him talk. Why, my goodness, I'm his wife and I swear *I* don't know how he does all the consuming he does. He simply—"

"Have a drink, Mr. Porfirio," Morey said, against all etiquette. "Rye? Scotch? Bourbon? Gin-and-tonic? Brandy Alexander? Dry Manha—I mean what would you like?" He became conscious

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that he was babbling like a fool.

"Anything," said the newsman. "Rye is fine. Now, Mr. Fry, I notice you've fixed up your place very attractively here and your wife says that your country home is just as nice. As soon as I came in, I said to myself, 'Beautiful home. Hardly a stick of furniture that isn't absolutely necessary. Might be a Grade Six or Seven.' And Mrs. Fry says the other place is even barer."

"She does, does she?" Morey challenged sharply. "Well, let me tell you, Mr. Porfirio, that every last scrap of my furniture allowance is accounted for! I don't know what you're getting at, but—"

"Oh, I certainly didn't mean to imply anything like *that!* I just want to get some information from you that I can pass on to our readers. You know, to sort of help them do as well as yourself. How *do* you do it?"

MOREY swallowed. "We—uh—well, we just keep after it. Hard work, that's all."

Porfirio nodded admiringly. "Hard work," he repeated, and fished a triple-folded sheet of paper out of his pocket to make notes on. "Would you say," he went on, "that anyone could do as well as you simply by devoting himself to it—setting a regular schedule, for example, and keeping to it very strictly?"

"Oh, yes," said Morey.

"In other words, it's only a matter of doing what you have to do every day?"

"That's it exactly. I handle the budget in my house—more experience than my wife, you see—but no reason a woman can't do it."

"Budgeting," Porfirio recorded approvingly. "That's our policy, too."

The interview was not the terror it had seemed, not even when Porfirio tactfully called attention to Cherry's slim waistline ("So many housewives, Mrs. Fry, find it difficult to keep from being—well, a little plump") and Morey had to invent endless hours on the exercise machines, while Cherry looked faintly perplexed, but did not interrupt.

From the interview, however, Morey learned the second half of the embezzler's lesson. After Porfirio had gone, he leaped in and spoke more than a little firmly to Cherry. "That business of exercise, dear. We really have to start doing it. I don't know if you've noticed it, but you *are* beginning to get just a trifle heavier and we don't want that to happen, do we?"

In the following grim and unnecessary sessions on the mechanical horses, Morey had plenty of time to reflect on the lesson.

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Stolen treasures are less sweet than one would like, when one dare not enjoy them in the open.

But some of Morey's treasures were fairly earned.

The new Bradmoor K-50 Spin-a-Game, for instance, was his very own. His job was design and creation, and he was a fortunate man in that his efforts were permitted to be expended along the line of greatest social utility—namely, to increase consumption.

The Spin-a-Game was a wellnigh perfect machine for the purpose. "Brilliant," said Wainwright, beaming, when the pilot machine had been put through its first tests. "Guess they don't call me the Talent-picker for nothing. I knew you could do it, boy!"

Even Howland was lavish in his praise. He sat munching on a plate of petits-fours (he was still only a Grade Three) while the tests were going on, and when they were over, he said enthusiastically, "It's a beauty, Morey. That series-corrupter—sensational! Never saw a prettier piece of machinery."

Morey flushed gratefully.

WAINWRIGHT left, exuding praise, and Morey patted his pilot model affectionately and admired its polychrome gleam. The looks of the machine, as Wainwright had lectured many a time, were as important as its function: "You have to make them *want* to play it, boy! They won't play it if they don't *see* it!" And consequently the whole K series was distinguished by flashing rainbows of light, provocative strains of music, haunting scents that drifted into the nostrils of the passerby with compelling effect.

Morey had drawn heavily on all the old masterpieces of design—the one-arm bandit, the pinball machine, the juke box. You put your ration book in the hopper. You spun the wheels until you selected the game you wanted to play against the machine. You punched buttons or spun dials or, in any of 325 different ways, you pitted your human skill against the magnetic-taped skills of the machine.

And you lost. You had a chance to win, but the inexorable statistics of the machine's setting made sure that if you played long enough, you had to lose.

That is to say, if you risked a ten-point ration stamp—showing, perhaps, that you had consumed three six-course meals—your statistic return was eight points. You might hit the jackpot and get a thousand points back, and thus be exempt from a whole freezer-full of steaks and joints and prepared vegetables; but it

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seldom happened. Most likely you lost and got nothing.

Got nothing, that is, in the way of your hazarded ration stamps. But the beauty of the machine, which was Morey's main contribution, was that, win or lose, you *always* found a pellet of vitamin-drenched, sugar-coated antibiotic hormone gum in the hopper. You played your game, won or lost your stake, popped your hormone gum into your mouth and played another. By the time that game was ended, the gum was used up, the coating dissolved; you discarded it and started another.

"That's what the man from the NRB liked," Howland told Morey confidentially. "He took a set of schematics back with him; they might install it on *all* new machines. Oh, you're the fair-haired boy, all right!"

It was the first Morey had heard about a man from the National Ration Board. It was good news. He excused himself and hurried to phone Cherry the story of his latest successes. He reached her at her mother's, where she was spending the evening, and she was properly impressed and affectionate. He came back to Howland in a glowing humor.

"Drink?" said Howland diffidently.

"Sure," said Morey. He could afford, he thought, to drink as much of Howland's liquor as he liked; poor guy, sunk in the consuming quicksands of Class Three. Only fair for somebody a little more successful to give him a hand once in a while.

And when Howland, learning that Cherry had left Morey a bachelor for the evening, proposed Uncle Piggotty's again, Morey hardly hesitated at all.

THE Bigelows were delighted to see him. Morey wondered briefly if they *had* a home; certainly they didn't seem to spend much time in it.

It turned out they did, because when Morey indicated virtuously that he'd only stopped in at Piggotty's for a single drink before dinner, and Howland revealed that he was free for the evening, they captured Morey and bore him off to their house.

Tanaquil Bigelow was haughtily apologetic. "I don't suppose this is the kind of place Mr. Fry is used to," she observed to her husband, right across Morey, who was standing between them. "Still, we call it home."

Morey made an appropriately polite remark. Actually, the place nearly turned his stomach. It was an enormous glaringly new mansion, bigger even than Morey's former house, stuffed to bursting with bulging sofas and pianos and massive mahogany chairs

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and tri-D sets and bedrooms and drawing rooms and breakfast rooms and nurseries.

The nurseries were a shock to Morey; it had never occurred to him that the Bigelows had children. But they did and, though the children were only five and eight, they were still up, under the care of a brace of robot nursemaids, doggedly playing with their overstuffed animals and miniature trains.

"You don't know what a comfort Tony and Dick are," Tanaquil Bigelow told Morey. "They consume so much more than their rations. Walter says that every family ought to have at least two or three children to, you know, help out. Walter's so intelligent about these things, it's a pleasure to hear him talk. Have you heard his poem, Morey? The one he calls *The Twoness of—*"

Morey hastily admitted that he had. He reconciled himself to a glum evening. The Bigelows had been eccentric but fun back at Uncle Piggotty's. On their own ground, they seemed just as eccentric, but painfully dull.

They had a round of cocktails, and another, and then the Bigelows no longer seemed so dull. Dinner was ghastly, of course; Morey was nouveau-riche enough to be a snob about his relatively Spartan table. But he minded his manners and sampled, with grim concentration, each successive course of chunky protein and rich marinades. With the help of the endless succession of table wines and liqueurs, dinner ended without destroying his evening or his strained digestive system.

And afterward, they were a pleasant company in the Bigelows' ornate drawing room. Tanaquil Bigelow, in consultation with the children, checked over their ration books and came up with the announcement that they would have a brief recital by a pair of robot dancers, followed by string music by a robot quartet. Morey prepared himself for the worst, but found before the dancers were through that he was enjoying himself. Strange lesson for Morey: When you didn't *have* to watch them, the robot entertainers were fun!

"Good night, dears," Tanaquil Bigelow said firmly to the children when the dancers were done. The boys rebelled, naturally, but they went. It was only a matter of minutes, though, before one of them was back, clutching at Morey's sleeve with a pudgy hand.

MOREY looked at the boy uneasily, having little experience with children. He said, "Uh—what is it, Tony?"

"Dick, you mean," the boy said. "Gimme your autograph." He

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poked an engraved pad and a vulgarly jeweled pencil at Morey.

Morey dazedly signed and the child ran off, Morey staring after him. Tanaquil Bigelow laughed and explained, "He saw your name in Porfirio's column. Dick *loves* Porfirio, reads him every day. He's such an intellectual kid, really. He'd always have his nose in a book if I didn't keep after him to play with his trains and watch tri-D."

"That was quite a nice write-up," Walter Bigelow commented — a little enviously, Morey thought. "Bet you make Consumer of the Year. I wish," he sighed, "that we could get a little ahead on the quotas the way you did. But it just never seems to work out. We eat and play and consume like crazy, and somehow at the end of the month we're always a little behind in something — everything keeps piling up—and then the Board sends us a warning, and they call me down and, first thing you know, I've got a couple of hundred added penalty points and we're worse off than before."

"Never you mind," Tanaquil replied staunchly. "Consuming isn't everything in life. You have your work."

Bigelow nodded judiciously and offered Morey another drink. Another drink, however, was not what Morey needed. He was sitting in a rosy glow, less of alcohol than of sheer contentment with the world.

He said suddenly, "Listen."

Bigelow looked up from his own drink. "Eh?"

"If I tell you something that's a *secret,* will you keep it that way?"

Bigelow rumbled, "Why, I guess so, Morey."

But his wife cut in sharply, "Certainly we will, Morey. Of course! What is it?" There was a gleam in her eye, Morey noticed. It puzzled him, but he decided to ignore it.

He said, "About that writeup. I—I'm not such a hot-shot consumer, really, you know. In fact—" All of a sudden, everyone's eyes seemed to be on him. For a tortured moment, Morey wondered if he was doing the right thing. A secret that two people know is compromised, and a secret known to three people is no secret. Still—

"It's like this," he said firmly. "You remember what we were talking about at Uncle Piggotty's that night? Well, when I went home I went down to the robot quarters, and I—"

He went on from there.

TANAQUIL Bigelow said triumphantly, "I *knew* it!"

Walter Bigelow gave his wife a mild, reproving look. He de-

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clared soberly. "You've done a big thing, Morey. A mighty big thing. God willing, you've pronounced the death sentence on our society as we know it. Future generations will revere the name of Morey Fry." He solemnly shook Morey's hand.

Morey said dazedly, "I *what*?"

Walter nodded. It was a valedictory. He turned to his wife. "Tanaquil, we'll have to call an emergency meeting."

"Of course, Walter," she said devotedly.

"And Morey will have to be there. Yes, you'll have to, Morey; no excuses. We want the Brotherhood to meet you. Right, Howland?"

Howland coughed uneasily. He nodded noncommittally and took another drink.

Morey demanded desperately, "What are you talking about? Howland, you tell me!"

Howland fiddled with his drink. "Well," he said, "it's like Tan was telling you that night. A few of us, well, politically mature persons have formed a little group. We—"

"*Little* group!" Tanaquil Bigelow said scornfully. "Howland, sometimes I wonder if you really catch the spirit of the thing at all! It's everybody, Morey, everybody in the world. Why, there are eighteen of us right here in Old Town! There are scores *more* all over the world! I knew you were up to something like this, Morey. I told Walter so the morning after we met you. I said, 'Walter, mark my words, that man Morey is up to something.' But I must say," she admitted worshipfully, "I didn't know it would have the *scope* of what you're proposing now! Imagine—a whole world of consumers, rising as one man, shouting the name of Morey Fry, fighting the Ration Board with the Board's own weapon—the robots. What poetic justice!"

BIGELOW nodded enthusiastically. "Call Uncle Piggotty's, dear," he ordered. "See if you can round up a quorum right now! Meanwhile, Morey and I are going belowstairs. Let's go, Morey—let's get the new world started!"

Morey sat there open-mouthed. He closed it with a snap. "Bigelow," he whispered, "do you mean to say that you're going to spread this idea around through some kind of subversive organization?"

"Subversive?" Bigelow repeated stiffly. "My dear man, *all* creative minds are subversive, whether they operate singly or in such a group as the Brotherhood of Freemen. I scarcely like—"

"Never mind what you like,"

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Morey insisted. "You're going to call a meeting of this Brotherhood and you want *me* to tell them what I just told you. Is that right?"

"Well—yes."

Morey got up. "I wish I could say it's been nice, but it hasn't. Good night!"

And he stormed out before they could stop him.

Out on the street, though, his resolution deserted him. He hailed a robot cab and ordered the driver to take him on the traditional time-killing ride through the park while he made up his mind.

The fact that he had left, of course, was not going to keep Bigelow from going through with his announced intention. Morey remembered, now, fragments of conversation from Bigelow and his wife at Uncle Piggotty's, and cursed himself. They had, it was perfectly true, said and hinted enough about politics and purposes to put him on his guard. All that nonsense about twoness had diverted him from what should have been perfectly clear: They were subversives indeed.

He glanced at his watch. Late, but not too late; Cherry would still be at her parents' home.

He leaned forward and gave the driver their address. It was like beginning the first of a hundred-shot series of injections: you know it's going to cure you, but it hurts just tne same.

MOREY said manfully: "And that's it, sir. I know I've been a fool. I'm willing to take the consequences."

Old Elon rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "Um," he said.

Cherry and her mother had long passed the point where they could say anything at all; they were seated side by side on a couch across the room, listening with expressions of strain and incredulity.

Elon said abruptly, "Excuse me. Phone call to make." He left the room to make a brief call and returned. He said over his shoulder to his wife, "Coffee. We'll need it. Got a problem here."

Morey said, "Do you think—I mean what should I do?"

Elon shrugged, then, surprisingly, grinned. "What can you do?" he demanded cheerfully. "Done plenty already, I'd say. Drink some coffee. Call I made," he explained, "was to Jim, my law clerk. He'll be here in a minute. Get some dope from Jim, then we'll know better."

Cherry came over to Morey and sat beside him. All she said was, "Don't worry," but to Morey it conveyed all the meaning in the world. He returned the pressure of her hand with a feeling of

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deepest relief. Hell, he said to himself, why *should* I worry? Worst they can do to me is drop me a couple of grades and what's so bad about that?

He grimaced involuntarily. He had remembered his own early struggles as a Class One and what *was* so bad about that.

The law clerk arrived, a smallish robot with a battered stainless-steel hide and dull coppery features. Elon took the robot aside for a terse conversation before he came back to Morey.

"As I thought," he said in satisfaction. "No precedent. No laws prohibiting. Therefore no crime."

"Thank heaven!" Morey said in ecstatic relief.

Elon shook his head. "They'll probably give you a reconditioning and you can't expect to keep your Grade Five. Probably call it anti-social behavior. Is, isn't it?"

Dashed, Morey said, "Oh." He frowned briefly, then looked up. "All right, Dad, if I've got it coming to me, I'll take my medicine."

"Way to talk," Elon said approvingly. "Now go home. Get a good night's sleep. First thing in the morning, go to the Ration Board. Tell 'em the whole story, beginning to end. They'll be easy on you." Elon hesitated. "Well, fairly easy," he amended. "I hope."

THE condemned man ate a hearty breakfast.

He had to. That morning, as Morey awoke, he had the sick certainty that he was going to be consuming triple rations for a long, long time to come.

He kissed Cherry good-by and took the long ride to the Ration Board in silence. He even left Henry behind.

At the Board, he stammered at a series of receptionist robots and was finally brought into the presence of a mildly supercilious young man named Hachette.

"My name," he started, "is Morey Fry. I—I've come to—talk over something I've been doing with—"

"Certainly, Mr. Fry," said Hachette. "I'll take you in to Mr. Newman right away."

"Don't you want to know what I did?" demanded Morey.

Hachette smiled. "What makes you think we don't know?" he said, and left.

That was Surprise Number One.

Newman explained it. He grinned at Morey and ruefully shook his head. "All the time we get this," he complained. "People just don't take the trouble to learn anything about the world around them. Son," he demanded, "what do you think a robot is?"

Morey said, "Huh?"

"I mean how do you think it

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operates? Do you think it's just a kind of a man with a tin skin and wire nerves?"

"Why, no. It's a machine, of course. It isn't *human*."

Newman beamed. "Fine!" he said. "It's a machine. It hasn't got flesh or blood or intestines—or a brain. Oh—" he held up a hand—"robots are *smart* enough. I don't mean that. But an electronic thinking machine, Mr. Fry, takes about as much space as the house you're living in. It has to. Robots don't carry brains around with them; brains are too heavy and much too bulky."

"Then how do they think?"

"With their brains, of course."

"But you just said—"

"I said they didn't *carry* them. Each robot is in constant radio communication with the Master Control on its TBR circuit—the 'Talk Between Robots' radio. Master Control gives the answer, the robot acts."

"I see," said Morey. "Well, that's very interesting, but—"

"But you still don't see," said Newman. "Figure it out. If the robot gets information from Master Control, do you see that Master Control in return necessarily gets information from the robot?"

"Oh," said Morey. Then, louder, "Oh! You mean that all my robots have been—" The words wouldn't come.

NEWMAN nodded in satisfaction. "Every bit of information of that sort comes to us as a matter of course. Why, Mr. Fry, if you hadn't come in today, we would have been sending for you within a very short time."

That was the second surprise. Morey bore up under it bravely. After all, it changed nothing, he reminded himself.

He said, "Well, be that as it may, sir, here I am. I came in of my own free will. I've been using my robots to consume my ration quotas—"

"Indeed you have," said Newman.

"—and I'm willing to sign a statement to that effect any time you like. I don't know what the penalty is, but I'll take it. I'm guilty; I admit my guilt."

Newman's eyes were wide. "Guilty?" he repeated. "Penalty?"

Morey was startled. "Why, yes," he said. "I'm not denying anything."

"Penalties," repeated Newman musingly. Then he began to laugh. He laughed, Morey thought, to considerable excess; Morey saw nothing he could laugh at, himself, in the situation. But the situation, Morey was forced to admit, was rapidly getting completely incomprehensible.

"Sorry," said Newman at last,

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wiping his eyes, "but I couldn't help it. Penalties! Well, Mr. Fry, let me set your mind at rest. I wouldn't worry about the penalties if I were you. As soon as the reports began coming through on what you had done with your robots, we naturally assigned a special team to keep observing you, and we forwarded a report to the national headquarters. We made certain—ah—recommendations in it and—well, to make a long story short, the answers came back yesterday.

"Mr. Fry, the National Ration Board is delighted to know of your contribution toward improving our distribution problem. Pending a further study, a tentative program has been adopted for setting up consuming-robot units all over the country based on your scheme. Penalties? Mr. Fry, you're a *hero*!"

A HERO has responsibilities. Morey's were quickly made clear to him. He was allowed time for a brief reassuring visit to Cherry, a triumphal tour of his old office, and then he was rushed off to Washington to be quizzed. He found the National Ration Board in a frenzy of work.

"The most important job we've ever done," one of the high officers told him. "I wouldn't be surprised if it's the last one we ever have! Yes, sir, we're trying to put ourselves out of business for good and we don't want a single thing to go wrong."

"Anything I can do to help—" Morey began diffidently.

"You've done fine, Mr. Fry. Gave us just the push we've been needing. It was there all the time for us to see, but we were too close to the forest to see the trees, if you get what I mean. Look, I'm not much on rhetoric and this is the biggest step mankind has taken in centuries and I can't put it into words. Let me show you what we've been doing."

He and a delegation of other officials of the Ration Board and men whose names Morey had repeatedly seen in the newspapers took Morey on an inspection tour of the entire plant.

"It's a closed cycle, you see," he was told, as they looked over a chamber of industriously plodding consumer-robots working off a shipment of shoes. "Nothing is permanently lost. If you want a car, you get one of the newest and best. If not, your car gets driven by a robot until it's ready to be turned in and a new one gets built for next year. We don't lose the metals—they can be salvaged. All we lose is a little power and labor. And the Sun and the atom give us all the power we need, and the robots give us more labor than we can

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use. Same thing applies, of course, to all products."

"But what's in it for the robots?" Morey asked.

"I beg your pardon?" one of the biggest men in the country said uncomprehendingly.

Morey had a difficult moment. His analysis had conditioned him against waste and this decidedly was sheer destruction of goods, no matter how scientific the jargon might be.

"If the consumer is just using up things for the sake of using them up," he said doggedly, realizing the danger he was inviting, "we could use wear-and-tear machines instead of robots. After all why waste *them*?"

They looked at each other worriedly.

"But that's what *you* were doing," one pointed out with a faint note of threat.

"Oh, no!" Morey quickly objected. "I built in satisfaction circuits—my training in design, you know. Adjustable circuits, of course."

"Satisfaction circuits?" he was asked. "Adjustable?"

"Well, sure. If the robot gets no satisfaction out of using up things—"

"Don't talk nonsense," growled the Ration Board official. "Robots aren't human. How do you make them feel satisfaction? And adjustable satisfaction at that!"

MOREY explained. It was a highly technical explanation, involving the use of great sheets of paper and elaborate diagrams. But there were trained men in the group and they became even more excited than before.

"Beautiful!" one cried in scientific rapture. "Why, it takes care of every possible moral, legal and psychological argument!"

"What does?" the Ration Board official demanded. "How?"

"You tell him, Mr. Fry."

Morey tried and couldn't. But he could *show* how his principle operated. The Ration Board lab was turned over to him, complete with more assistants than he knew how to give orders to, and they built satisfaction circuits for a squad of robots working in a hat factory.

Then Morey gave his demonstration. The robots manufactured hats of all sorts. He adjusted the circuits at the end of the day and the robots began trying on the hats, squabbling over them, each coming away triumphantly with a huge and diverse selection. Their metallic features were incapable of showing pride or pleasure, but both were evident in the way they wore their hats, their fierce possessiveness . . . and their faster, neater, more intensive, more *dedicated* work to produce a still greater quantity

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of hats . . . which they also were allowed to own.

"You see?" an engineer exclaimed delightedly. "They can be adjusted to *want* hats, to wear them lovingly, to wear the hats to pieces. And not just for the sake of wearing them out—the hats are an incentive for them!"

"But how can we go on producing just hats and more hats?" the Ration Board man asked puzzledly. "Civilization does not live by hats alone."

"That," said Morey modestly, "is the beauty of it. Look."

He set the adjustment of the satisfaction circuit as porter-robots brought in skids of gloves. The hat-manufacturing robots fought over the gloves with the same mechanical passion as they had for hats.

"And that can apply to anything we — or the robots — produce," Morey added. "Everything from pins to yachts. But the point is that they get satisfaction from possession, and the craving can be regulated according to the glut in various industries, and the robots show their appreciation by working harder." He hesitated. "That's what I did for my servant-robots. It's a feedback, you see. Satisfaction leads to more work—and *better* work — and that means more goods, which they can be made to want, which means incentive to work, and so on, all around."

"Closed cycle," whispered the Ration Board man in awe. "A *real* closed cycle this time!"

And so the inexorable laws of supply and demand were irrevocably repealed. No longer was mankind hampered by inadequate supply or drowned by overproduction. What mankind needed was there. What the race did not require passed into the insatiable — and adjustable — robot maw. Nothing was wasted.

For a pipeline has two ends.

Morey was thanked, complimented, rewarded, given a ticker-tape parade through the city, and put on a plane back home. By that time, the Ration Board had liquidated itself.

CHERRY met him at the airport. They jabbered excitedly at each other all the way to the house.

In their own living room, they finished the kiss they had greeted each other with. At last Cherry broke away, laughing.

Morey said, "Did I tell you I'm through with Bradmoor? From now on I work for the Board as civilian consultant. *And,*" he added impressively, "starting right away, I'm a Class Eight!"

"My!" gasped Cherry, so worshipfully that Morey felt a twinge of conscience.

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He said honestly, "Of course, if what they were saying in Washington is so, the classes aren't going to mean much pretty soon. Still, it's quite an honor."

"It certainly is," Cherry said staunchly. "Why, Dad's only a Class Eight himself and he's been a judge for I don't know *how* many years."

Morey pursed his lips. "We can't all be fortunate," he said generously. "Of course, the classes still will count for *something* — that is, a Class One will have so much to consume in a year, a Class Two will have a little less, and so on. But each person in each class will have robot help, you see, to do the actual consuming. The way it's going to be, special facsimile robots will—"

Cherry flagged him down. "I know, dear. Each family gets a robot duplicate of every person in the family."

"Oh," said Morey, slightly annoyed. "How did you know?"

"Ours came yesterday," she explained. "The man from the Board said we were the first in the area — because it was your idea, of course. They haven't even been activated yet. I've still got them in the Green Room. Want to see them?"

"Sure," said Morey buoyantly. He dashed ahead of Cherry to inspect the results of his own brainstorm. There they were, standing statue-still against the wall, waiting to be energized to begin their endless tasks.

"Yours is real pretty," Morey said gallantly. "But—say, is that thing supposed to look like me?" He inspected the chromium face of the man-robot disapprovingly.

"Only roughly, the man said." Cherry was right behind him. "Notice anything else?"

Morey leaned closer, inspecting the features of the facsimile robot at a close range. "Well, no," he said. "It's got a kind of a squint that I don't like, but— Oh, you mean *that!*" He bent over to examine a smaller robot, half hidden between the other pair. It was less than two feet high, big-headed, pudgy-limbed, thick-bellied. In fact, Morey thought wonderingly, it looked almost like—

"My God!" Morey spun around, staring wide-eyed at his wife. "You mean—"

"I mean," said Cherry, blushing slightly.

Morey reached out to grab her in his arms.

"Darling!" he cried. "Why didn't you *tell* me?"

—FREDERIK POHL

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Limiting Factor

By THEODORE R. COGSWELL

Is there a Homo superior in the audience? This story is printed primarily for you!

Illustrated by VIDMER

THE beautiful girl slammed the door shut behind her and for a moment there was silence in the apartment. The blond young man in baggy tweeds looked at the closed door uncertainly, made a motion as if to follow her, and then stopped himself.

"Good boy," said a voice from the open window.

"Who's there?" The young man turned and squinted out into the darkness.

"It's me. Ferdie."

"You didn't have to spy on me. I told Karl I'd break off."

"I wasn't spying, Jan. Karl sent me over. Mind if I come in?"

Jan grunted indifferently and a short stocky man drifted in through the window. As his feet touched the floor, he gave a little sigh of relief. He went back to the window, leaned out, and looked down the full eighty stories to the street below.

"It's a long way down there,"

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he said. "Levitation's fine, but I don't think it will ever take the place of the old-fashioned elevator. The way I look at it is that if Man was intended to fly, he'd have been born with wings."

"Man, maybe," said Jan, "but not superman. Want a drink? I do."

Ferdie nodded. "Maybe our kids will take it as a matter of course, but I just can't relax when I'm floating. I'm always afraid I'll blow a neuron or something and go spinning down." He gave a shudder and swallowed the drink in one gulp. "How did it go? Did she take it pretty hard?"

"Tomorrow will be worse. She's angry now and that acts as a sort of emotional anesthetic. When that wears off, it's really going to hurt. I don't feel so good myself. We were going to be married in March."

"I know," said Ferdie sympathetically, "but if it's any consolation, you're going to be so busy from now on that you won't have much time to think about it. Karl sent me over to pick you up because we're pulling out tonight. Which reminds me, I'd better call old Kleinholtz and tell him he'll have to find himself a new lab technician. Mind if I use your phone?"

Jan shook his head mutely and gestured toward the hallway.

TWO minutes later, Ferdie was back. "The old boy gave me a rough time," he said. "Wanted to know why I was walking out on him just when the apparatus was about ready for testing. I told him I had a sudden attack of itchy feet and there wasn't much I could do about it." He shrugged. "Well, the rough work's done, anyway. About all that's left is running the computations and I couldn't handle that if I wanted to. It's strange, Jan—I've spent a whole year helping him put that gadget together, and I still don't know what it's for. I asked him again just now and the tight-mouthed old son of a gun just laughed at me and said that if I knew which side my bread was buttered on, I'd get back to work in a hurry. I guess it's pretty big. It's a shame I won't be around to see it." He moved toward the window. "We'd better be on our way, Jan. The rest will be waiting for us."

Jan stood irresolute and then slowly shook his head. "I'm not going."

"What?"

"You heard me. I'm not going."

Ferdie went over to him and took him gently by the arm. "Come on now, boy. I know it's hard, but you've made your decision and you've got to stick to

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LIMITING FACTOR

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it. You can't pull back now."

Jan turned away sullenly. "You can all go to hell! I'm going after her."

"Don't be a fool. No woman is worth that much."

"She is to me. I have been a fool, but I'm not going to be any longer. I was a pretty happy guy before you people came along. I had a job I liked and a girl I loved and the future looked good. If I back-track fast enough, maybe I'll be able to salvage something. Tell the rest I've changed my mind and I'm pulling out."

The short stocky man went over and poured himself another drink. "No, you're not, Jan. You aren't enough of a superman to be able to forget those poor devils down there." He gestured at the peaceful city that spread out below them.

"There won't be any trouble in our time," Jan said.

"Or in our children's," agreed Ferdie, "but there will be in our grandchildren's and then it will be too late. Once the row starts, you know how it will come out. You've got an extra something in your brain—use it!"

Jan looked out into the night and finally turned to answer. Before he could, an angry voice suddenly boomed inside his head.

"What's holding you up over there? We haven't got all night!"

"Come on," said Ferdie. "We can argue later. If Karl is wound up enough about something to telepath, it must be important. Me, I'll stick to the telephone. What's the point to having a built-in tranceiver, if you have to put up with a splitting headache every time you use it?" He stepped to the window and climbed up on the sill. "Ready?"

Jan hesitated and slowly climbed up beside him.

"I'll go talk to Karl, anyway," he said. "Maybe you're right, but it still hurts like hell."

"The head?"

"No, the heart. All set?"

Ferdie nodded. They both closed their eyes, tensed, and drifted slowly up into the night.

KARL was stretched out on the couch with his head in Miranda's lap and a look of suffering on his face. She was gently massaging his temples.

"Next time use a telephone," said Ferdie as he and Jan came in.

Karl sat up suddenly. "What took you so long?"

"What do you mean, so long? An aircab would have got us here a lot quicker, but we're supermen—we've got to levitate."

"I'm not amused," said Karl. "Are you all set?"

Ferdie nodded. "All ties broken and everything prepared for a neat and tidy disappearance."

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"And him?" Karl looked narrowly at Jan.

"He's all right."

"Yeah, I'm fine," said Jan. "Girl and job dumped down the drain. Do you want the details? Ferdie's boss figured he'd be back. He said Ferdie knew which side his bread was buttered on. My girl didn't say anything; she just slammed the door in my face. And now that that's over, if you'll just detail me a female I'll start breeding little supermen for you. How about Miranda? She's one of the elect."

"Climb off it, Jan," Karl said sharply. "We know it wasn't easy, but dramatics won't help."

Jan threw himself sullenly into an overstuffed chair and stared morosely at the ceiling.

Karl pulled himself to his feet and made a quick survey of the room. ". . . thirty-seven, thirty-eight—I guess we're all here. Go ahead, Henry. You've got the floor."

A tall, prematurely gray man began to speak quietly. "It's got to be tonight. There is heavy cloud cover over Alta Pass that goes up to twenty thousand feet. If we're careful, we should be able to take off without detection. I suggest we leave at once. It'll take some time to move the ship out of the cave and we want to be on our way before the weather clears."

"Check," said Karl. He turned to Miranda. "You know your job. The ship will be back to pick up the new crop in ten months or so."

"I still think you should leave somebody else behind," she objected. "I can't listen twenty-four hours a day."

"You're just looking for company," Karl said impatiently. "The unconscious mental signals that mark the *change* go on for a week or more before the individual knows anything is happening. You'll have plenty of time to make contact."

"Oh, all right, but don't forget to send a relief back for me. It's going to be lonely with all of you gone."

Karl gave her a short but affectionate kiss. "Okay, gang, let's go."

THE engine room of the ship consisted simply of an oval table with ten bucket seats spaced equidistantly around it. At the moment, only one of them was occupied. Ferdie sat there, his eyes closed and his face pale and tense. As a hand touched his shoulder, he jumped, and for a moment the ship quivered slightly until the new mind took over.

Ferdie ran his hands through his hair and then pressed them against his aching temples. Then

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he stood up. There was a slight stagger to his walk as he pulled himself up the ladder into the forward observation room.

"Rough shift?" said Jan.

Ferdie groaned. "They're all rough. If I'd known how much work was going to be involved in this superman stuff, I'd have arranged to be born to different parents. You may think there is something romantic about dragging this tin ark through hyperspace by sheer mental pressure, but to me it feels like the old horse-and-buggy days with me as the horse. Mental muscle, physical muscle—what's the difference? It's still plain hard work. Give me an old-fahioned machine where I can sit back and push buttons."

"Maybe this was your last turn at the table." Jan looked out at the gray nothingness on the other side of the observation port. "Karl says we're due to pull out of warp this evening."

"And by the time we look around and find that Alpha Centauri has no suitable planets, it'll be my turn to pull us back in again."

LATE that evening, a bell clanged through the ship. A moment later, all ten seats in the engine room were occupied.

"Brace yourself and grab hold," snapped Karl. "This is going to take a heap of twisting."

It did. Three times, figures collapsed and were quickly replaced by those waiting behind them, but at last they broke through into normal space. With a sigh of relief, they all relaxed. Karl reached over and switched on the ship intercom.

"How does she look up there, Ferdie?"

"Alpha Centauri blazing dead ahead." There was a slight pause. "Also there's a small man in a derby hat directly off the starboard bow."

Those in the engine room deserted their posts and made a mad dash for the forward observation compartment. Ferdie was standing as if transfixed, staring raptly out into space. As Karl came up and grabbed his arm, he pointed with a shaking finger.

"Look!"

Karl looked. A plump little figure wearing a severly cut business suit, high-buttoned shoes, spats, and a derby hat was floating a scant five yards from the observation port. He waved cheerily at them and then opening the briefcase he carried, removed a large sheet of paper. He held it up and pointed to the words lettered on it in large black print.

"What does it say?" demanded Karl. "My eyes don't seem to be working."

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Ferdie squinted. "This is insanity."

"It says that?"

"No, I do. It says, 'May I come on board?' "

"What do you think?"

"I think we're both crazy, but if he wants to, I say let him."

KARL made a gesture of assent to the figure floating outside and pointed aft to the airlock. The little man shook his head, unbuttoned his vest, and reached inside it. He twiddled with something for a moment and then disappeared. A split-second later, he was standing in the middle of the observation compartment. He took off his hat and bowed politely to the jaw-dropped group.

"Your servant, gentlemen. My name is Thwiskumb — Ferzial Thwiskumb. I'm with Gliterslie, Quimbat and Swench, Exporters. I was on my way to Formalhaut on a customer service call when I noted an odd disturbance in sub-ether, so I stopped for a moment to see what would come out. You're from Sol, aren't you?"

Karl nodded dumbly.

"Thought so," said the little man. "Do you mind if I ask your destination?"

He had to repeat the question before he was able to get a coherent answer. Ferdie was the first to recover enough from shock to say anything.

"We were hoping to find a habitable planet in the Alpha Centauri system."

Mr. Thwiskumb pursed his lips. "There is one, but there are difficulties. It's reserved for the Primitives, you see. I don't know how the Galactic Council would view settlement. Of course, the population has been shrinking of late and there's practically nobody left on the southern continent." He stopped and thought. "Tell you what I'll do. When I get to Formalhaut, I'll give the Sector Administrator a call and see what he has to say. And now if you'll excuse me, I don't want to be late for my appointment. Gliterslie, Quimbat and Swench pride themselves on their punctuality."

He was reaching inside his vest again when Karl grabbed his arm. The flesh felt reassuringly solid.

"Have we gone insane?" begged the leader.

"Oh, dear me, of course not," said Mr. Thwiskumb, disengaging himself gently. "You're just a few thousand years behind on the development cycle. The migration of the Superiors from our home planet took place when your people were still in the process of discovering the use of fire."

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"Migration?" repeated Karl blankly.

"The same thing you're off on," said the little man. He removed his glasses and polished them carefully. "The mutations that follow the release of atomic power almost always end up in the evolution of a group with some sort of control over the *terska* force. Then the problem of future relations with the Normals comes up, and the Superiors quite often decide on a secret migration to avoid future conflict. It's a mistake, though. When you take a look at Centauri III, you'll see what I mean. I'm afraid you'll find it a depressing place."

Placing his derby firmly on his head, he gave a genial wave of farewell and disappeared.

A wild look was in Karl's eyes as he held up his arms for silence.

"There's just one thing I want to know," he said. "Have I or have I not been talking to a small man in a derby hat for the past five minutes?"

FORTY-EIGHT hours later, they pulled away from Centauri III and parked in free space until they could decide what they wanted to do. It was a depressed and confused group that gathered in the forward observation compartment to discuss their future.

"There's no use wasting time now talking about what we saw down there," said Karl. "What we've got to decide is whether we're going to push on to other solar systems until we find a planet that will suit our needs, or whether we are going to return to Earth."

A little red-headed girl waved her hand.

"Yes, Martha?" Karl said.

"I think we *are* going to have to talk about what we saw down there. If our leaving Earth means that we are condemning it to a future like that, we're going to have to go back."

There was an immediate objection from a tense young man in horn-rimmed glasses.

"Whether we go back or ahead will make little difference in our lifetimes, so we can't be accused of personal selfishness if we don't return to Earth. The people it will make a difference to are our descendants. That strange little man who materialized among us two days ago and then vanished is a concrete demonstration of what they can be—if we stay apart and develop the new powers that have been given us. I say the welfare of the new superrace is more important than that of the Ordinaries we left behind!"

There was a short muttering of agreement as he sat down.

"Next?" Karl asked.

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Half a dozen people tried to get the floor at once, but Ferdie managed to get recognized.

"I say go back!" he stated. "And since the previous speaker was talking about accusations, let me say that I can't be accused of personal bias, either. As far as I'm concerned, I would just as soon spend the next several years cruising around to the far corners to see what's up. But the longer we're gone, the harder it will be to fit ourselves back into normal society.

"Look, we left Earth because we thought it was the best thing for mankind. And when I say *mankind,* I mean the Normals, the parent race. What we saw down there—" he gestured in the direction of Centauri III— "is dramatic proof that we were wrong. It would seem that a scattering of Superiors is somehow necessary to keep human society from collapsing. Maybe we act as a sort of essential catalyst or something. Whatever it is, we're needed. If we walk out on Man, we'll never be able to live with ourselves in our brave new world."

KARL looked worried. "I think I agree with you," he said, "but if we go back, we'll be dumped into the old problem of future relations again. Right now there are so few of us that if we were found out, we'd be looked upon as freaks. But what's going to happen when our numbers start to shoot up? Any group that has special powers is suspect, and I don't relish the thought of condemning our descendants to a world where they'll have to kill or be killed."

"If worst comes to worst, they can always take off the way we did," replied Ferdie. "But I'd like to point out that migration was the first solution proposed and the one we've given all our attention to. There must be other ways out, if we look for them. We've got to give it a try, anyway." He turned to the young man in the horn-rimmed glasses. "How about it, Jim?"

The other nodded reluctantly. "I'm dubious, but maybe we should go back and make the try you've been talking about." His voice sharpened. "Under one condition, though. If the Normals start to give us any trouble, we get out again!"

"I'll agree to that," said Ferdie. "How about the rest of you?"

"Let's make it official," said Karl. "All in favor of returning?"

The *ayes* had it.

There was a sound of polite applause from the doorway. Mr. Thwiskumb had returned. "A very wise decision," he said, "very wise. It demonstrates a commendable social maturity. I

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am sure your descendants will thank you for it."

"I don't know what for," said Karl sadly. "We're robbing them of all the things that you have. Instantaneous teleportation, for example. It's no particular sacrifice for us—we're just starting to develop the powers within us—but it will be for them. I don't know if we are right, asking them to pay such a price."

"What about the other price?" demanded Ferdie. "What about that scrawny grimy gang down on Centauri III, sitting apathetically in the hot sun and scratching themselves? We also have no right to condemn the Ordinaries to a future like that."

"Oh, you wouldn't be doing that," said Mr. Thwiskumb mildly. "Those people down there aren't Ordinaries."

"What!"

"Dear me, no. They weren't the ones that were left behind. They are the descendants of those who migrated. Those poor devils down there are pure-blooded Superiors. When they ran into the limiting factor, they just gave up."

"Then what accounts for you? You're obviously a Superior."

"THAT's a very kind thing to say," answered the little man, "but I'm just as ordinary as anyone can be. We're all Ordinaries where I come from. Our Superiors left a long time ago." He chuckled. "It's a funny thing—at the time, we didn't know they were gone, so we didn't miss them. We just went about business as usual. Later, we found them, but it was already too late. You see, the big difference was that we had an unlimited area of development and they didn't. There's no limit to the machine, but there is to the human organism. No matter how much training you have, there is a limit to how loud you can shout. After that, you have to get yourself an amplifier.

"A slight neural rearrangement makes it possible for you to tap and control certain sources of physical energy that aren't directly available to the ordinary man of your planet, but you are still dealing with natural forces . . . and natural organic limits. There is a point beyond which you can't go without the aid of the machine, an organic limiting factor. But after several generations spent in mastering what is inside your heads, rather than struggling for control of the world around you, and the time comes when your natural limits are reached, the very concept of the machine has been lost. Then where do you go from there?"

He waited for an answer, but nobody offered one.

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"There is an old story in our folklore," he continued, "about a boy who bought himself an animal somewhat like your terrestrial calf. He thought that if he lifted it above his head ten times a day while it was little, he would build up his strength gradually until he would still be able to lift it over his head when it was a full-grown animal. He soon discovered the existence of a natural limiting factor. Do you see what I mean? When those people down there reached their natural limits, there was no place for them to go but backward. We had the machine, though, and the machine can always be made smaller and better, so we had no stopping point."

He reached inside his vest and pulled out a small shining object about the size of a cigarette case. "This is hooked by a tight beam to the great generators on Altair. Of course I wouldn't, but I could move planets with it if I wanted to. It's simply a matter of applying a long enough lever, and the lever, if you'll remember, is a simple machine."

Karl looked dazed. In fact, everyone did.

"Yeah," he muttered, "yeah, I see what you mean." He turned to the group. "All right, let's get back to the engine room. We've got a long flight ahead of us."

"How long?" asked the little man.

"Four months if we push it."

"Shocking waste of time."

"I suppose you can do better?" Karl inquired belligerently.

"Oh, dear me, yes," said Mr. Thwiskumb. "It would take me about a minute and a half. You Superiors dawdle so—I'm glad I'm normal."

JAN was doing a happy little dance through his apartment when his buzzer rang. He opened the door and Ferdie stepped in.

"I came up on the elevator," he said. "It's a lot easier on the nerves. My, you look pleased

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with yourself. I know why, too —I saw her coming out of the lobby when I came in. She walked as if she were wearing clouds instead of shoes."

Jan did a little caper. "We're getting married next week and I got my job back."

"I got mine back, too," said Ferdie. "Old Kleinholtz gave me a little lecture about walking out on him when work was at its heaviest, but he was too pleased with himself to do more than a perfunctory job. When he took me back into the lab, I saw why. He's finally got his gadget running."

"What did it turn out to be? A time machine?"

Ferdie grinned mysteriously. "Something almost as good. It lifts things."

"What kind of things?"

"Any kind. Even people. Old Kleinholtz had a little set of controls rigged up that he could strap to his chest. He turned the machine on and went flying around the lab like a bird."

Jan's jaw dropped. "The way we do?"

"Just the same, boy. He's found a way to tap the terska force. Really *tap* it, not suck little driblets out, as we do. Another ten years and the Ordinaries will be able to do anything we can do, only better. And a good thing, too. Telepathy gives us headaches, and levitation is a pleasant Sunday afternoon pastime, but hardly something to build a civilization on. As Mr. Thwiskumb said, the machine has no natural limits, so I guess our worries about the future are over. Nobody is going to be unhappy about us being able to fly thirty miles an hour when they can make it instantaneous. Looks like superman is obsolete before he even had a chance to get started."

He stretched his arms and yawned. "Guess I'd better get home and hit the sack. It's going to be a busy day at the lab tomorrow."

He walked over to the open window and looked out.

"Flying home?" asked Jan.

Ferdie grinned and shook his head. "I'm waiting until the new improved model comes out."

—THEODORE R. COGSWELL

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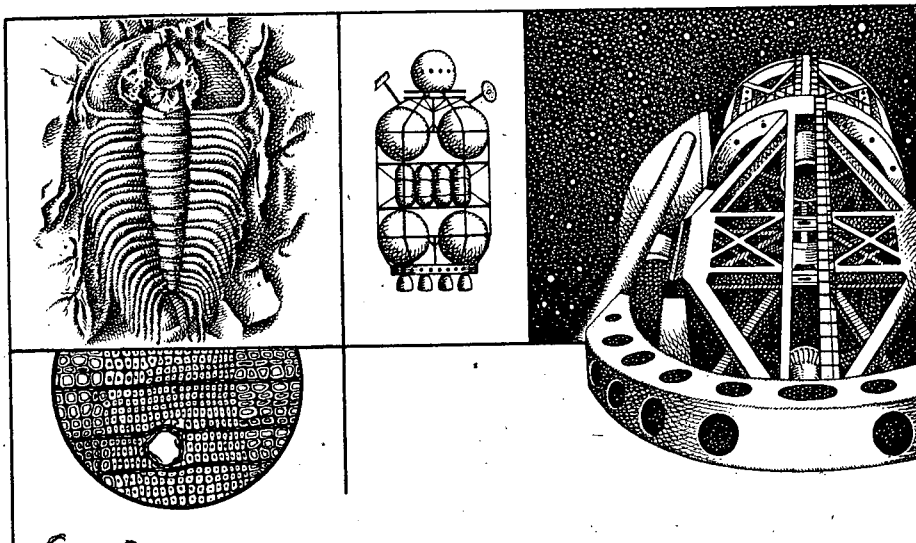
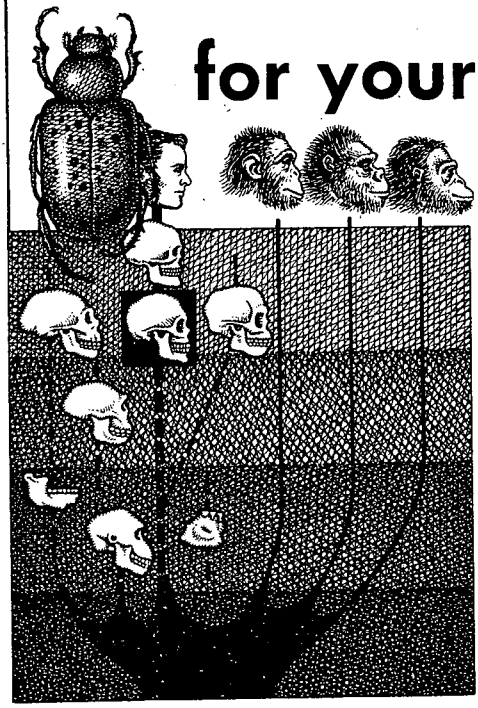


for your information

By WILLY LEY



THE CASE OF THE LYING STONES

IF this piece has any moral at all, it should be construed as a lecture on credulity. Not only should you be careful believing what you hear and read, you can't even always trust "tangible evidence." Of course tangible evidence is evidence all right, but there still remains the question: "evidence for what?" But let's proceed with what is probably the worst recorded case of mis-

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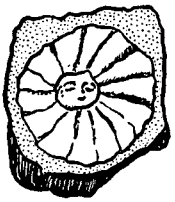
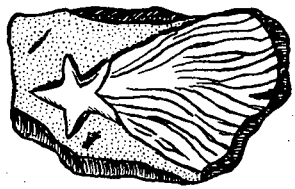




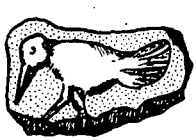
leading evidence in all history.

The year was 1710 A.D. The place was the city of Würzburg, the capital of Lower Franconia, in southwestern Germany. Würzburg has a university that is famous for several reasons. One of these reasons is that it was founded twice, once in 1403 and once in 1582. Another reason is that this is the place where Dr. Wilhelm Konrad Röntgen discovered his Röntgen rays or X-rays in 1896. And the third reason for its fame is the case I am going to talk about.

In 1710, some people informed the professors of the university that they had found an enormous bone, as hard and heavy as stone and so huge that only a giant could have been its original possessor. A few days later, several men, groaning and sweating, carried the bone up the steps and placed it on a sturdy oaken table. The professors of the university were not as happy about this as professors of a modern university would be. They would have preferred to close their eyes, but the government had asked for an opinion and there was nothing else they could do but give one.

The professors met in a formal council and, since the object did seem to be a bone, the Professor of Medicine was the logical chairman. His name was Johann Bartholomaeus Adam Beringer.

THE bone was actually the fossilized relic of a member of the elephant tribe which had lived in the area of Würzburg some 10 or 15 million years earlier. But the council of professors, prodded by its chairman, arrived at the



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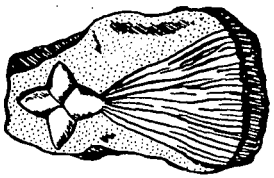
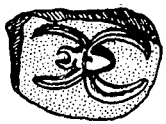
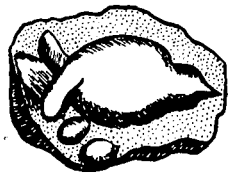
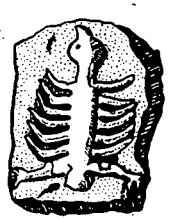




conclusion that this was a *lusus naturae*. The term they used may be rendered in English as "play of Nature," but what they had in mind when they used it will probably remain a mystery for all time to come.

Fossils, in those days, were recognized for what they really were by only a few advanced thinkers. Most of the savants held a vague kind of belief of a mineral creation paralleling animate creation, but did not agree with each other on how it had come about. A few thought that, under special circumstances, a plant seed or a fish egg might develop in a mineral environment, producing a mineral plant or mineral fish. Others suggested a vapidly mystical life-giving mist coming from the sea. Still others held astrological influences responsible. And some said that the mineral creation may have been the result of God's practicing with mineral matter before He progressed to animate creation.

But all the proponents of these conflicting beliefs presented a united front against the fantastic heretics who said that a fossil fish probably once was a live fish before it became a fossil. As for the *Professor medicinae* Beringer, he was convinced that such an explanation was sheerest nonsense and he lectured his students on "plays of Nature." The students were perfectly willing to absorb their professor's opinions. They went along with the first repetition and the next. They had, after all, enrolled to study medicine.

At about that time, Prof. Beringer started looking for fossils,



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presumably to have more material for his interminable arguments. There are fossils in the Würzburg area, but Prof. Beringer happened to have a very special kind of luck. One day he came home with a slab of stone showing in unmistakably clear bas relief the picture of a comet. Maybe those who thought that astrological influences caused the "plays of Nature" were not so wrong, after all. Some time later, he found a stone slab with a crescent moon. Then another comet. Then a whole bird, complete with egg.

The more diligently Prof. Beringer dug in his favorite place, the more astonishing the results. Strange animals that nobody had ever seen alive and which were not mentioned in even the biggest natural history books. Enormous spiders and their webs. And one day a stone slab with Hebrew letters.

Like other scholars of his time, Prof. Beringer had been taught three classical languages: Latin, Greek and Hebrew. These letters seemed to spell the name of God.

In so important a matter, Prof. Beringer did not wish to rely on his own knowledge alone. He got in touch with the rabbi of a nearby Jewish community and the rabbi confirmed his opinion—the letters did spell the name of God!

BERINGER hired an artist to make careful drawings of his finds, then an engraver to transfer the drawings to plates. Meanwhile, he wrote a book—in Latin, of course—of fourteen chapters, with a long preface and a nine-page dedication to Dr. Christopher Francis, the Prince Bishop of Würzburg. Since Beringer was not at all secretive about his work, everybody around the university knew about it. He had friends who tried to make him realize that he had been hoaxed. A few students even confessed that they had made the "lying stones" that Beringer had dug up. His friends quoted the case of Father Athanasius Kircher, S. J., who had also taught at Würzburg for a while and who had been similarly hoaxed by his students.

Beringer grew indignant. All this "friendly" advice and the student's confessions were merely part of a plot to rob him of the glory of his discovery. He finished his book and it appeared in 1726 under the title *Lithographiae Wirceburgensis.*

The laughter that greeted the publication was unanimous. And, it is said, at the same time Beringer was confronted with a stone on which he could read his own name in "fossil" Hebrew letters. Shocked, he spent what money he had trying to buy up all available copies of his expensive work.

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Fourteen years after the publication of the book that was to make him famous—and did, in a way—Beringer died. By then the book was famous in itself and a bookseller in Hamburg bought all the copies left in the hands of the original publisher and sold them. They sold so briskly, in fact, that another edition was printed in 1767.

There can be no doubt that no man has ever been more thoroughly hoaxed than Beringer. It is still doubtful just why. That students made the "lying stones" is certain, but whether they did this as a joke or whether some unknown enemy of Beringer's was behind the whole cruel deception has never been cleared up.

In 1940, the University of Würzburg still had 30 of the original "lying stones" in its collection. I have not been able to find out what has happened to them since. But copies of the book are in many large libraries.

THE IRON PILLAR OF DELHI

OLD Cajus Plinius Secundus, or Pliny the Elder, as he is often called to distinguish him from Pliny the Younger (who was his nephew), indulged in one of his comparatively rare philosophical speculations when, in the course of writing his monumental *Natural History*, he came to the subject of iron. Iron, he said, is useful for building houses, cleaving rocks and for many other purposes. But it is also used by robbers and for war.

However, he continued, "Nature, in conformity with her usual benevolence, has limited the power of iron by inflicting upon it the punishment of rust; and has thus displayed her usual foresight in rendering nothing in existence more perishable than the substance which brings the greatest dangers upon perishable mortality."

The modern engineer may not be too convinced about the "usual benevolence of Nature," but he is still fully aware of the "punishment of rust." Much of what goes under the general term of maintenance is the effort to counteract this fact. Our big bridges are tended by permanent groups of painters; by the time they have finished painting at one end, it is time to start again at the other. And everybody know what happens to a piece of machinery that is left outdoors for a year.

But while everybody has been reconciled to the fact that the "punishment of rust" existed, there seemed to be a nagging example, apparently pointing out that things did not have to be that way.

In the city of Delhi—more spe-

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cifically, in the so-called Old City, which is some ten miles from the modern section—there stands an impressive old tower. Its name is Kutb-Minar and it was built to commemorate the victories of an old Mohammedan general whose name was Kutb-ud-din. The tower is 238 feet tall and is built of colored sandstone, with red sandstone at the bottom that gradually changes to bright orange sandstone at the top. Part of this monument is an iron pillar.

This Iron Pillar is untended in the sense that nothing was ever done to prevent it from rusting. The Iron Pillar is virtually uncorroded in spite of lack of care. And it is almost 1500 years old.

For almost two centuries, the Iron Pillar of Delhi has been quoted as an example of iron that does not rust. As is usually the case when the real reason for something is unknown, the rust-resistance of the Iron Pillar inspired multitudes of conjectures. The most obvious and least provable idea was, of course, that this was an example of a "lost art." Presumably some Moslem savant, or armorer, or even a simple blacksmith, had found a method of making iron rustproof by the addition of some now forgotten substance. Or, which would be even harder to establish, by a process of treatment.

Another idea—the one I heard from a professor of mine when I was a student—was that the Iron Pillar might be rustproof because of the absence of all additions. All the iron we use, from steel beams to razor blades, is chemically "impure"—it contains various additions, ranging from other metals like vanadium to simple carbon and silicon. In fact, it is very hard to produce iron that has almost no impurities. So the reasoning ran that somebody in the Moslem world of 1500 years ago had hit, evidently by a lucky chance, upon absolutely pure iron. And it was postulated that absolutely pure iron would not rust.

That assertion is doubtful, to say the least. But the mystery of the Iron Pillar has been solved.

Everybody had been looking in the wrong direction. People had studied the pillar instead of its surroundings. After a careful survey made by J. C. Hudson of the British Iron and Steel Research Association, it seems that the famous pillar is still standing in Delhi because of the dry climate. According to Hudson, there is virtually no rusting as long as the relative humidity of the air is less than 70 per cent. And at Delhi that humidity is very rarely even approached.

No "lost art." Nothing that is in any way mysterious or impres-

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sive. Just dry weather for 15 centuries.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Many stars, perhaps the majority, are double or multiple. Has it been established that an orbit stable enough, as well as suitable in other respects, can exist for a hypothetical planet to permit long-term evolution of life in these systems? If so, have any general requirements for the systems been laid down?

Alfred B. Mason, M. D.
Camp Lejeune, N. C.

Offhand, I can think of three kinds of stable orbits in double-star systems, depending on the type of system.

If we have a close double with the two stars not much more than one star-diameter—say, one million miles—apart, planets at a distance of about 100 star-diameters will orbit around the pair as if it were a single star.

On the other hand, if the two stars forming the binary are 1,000 star-diameters apart, each star could have a family of planets that would be only slightly perturbed by the other star.

Finally, there is a possibility that the two stars are about 100 or 150 star-diameters apart and that one of them is several times as massive as the other. In this case, a planet could well revolve around the larger of the two in an equilateral ("Trojan") position.

Planets in stable orbits are therefore possible in binary star systems.

The V-2 rocket as used against London in the last war had, I understand, a mass-ratio of about 3 1/2. What is the mass-ratio of the most efficient rocket developed in the USA since and what effect does the two-step rocket have upon the overall mass-ratio?

Alan Jackson
252 Eltham High Street
London S. S. 7.
England

Since the weight of the structure of the V-2 rocket was (in rounded-off figures) 3 tons, the weight of the payload one ton and the weight of the fuels 8 tons, the mass-ratio of the V-2 was almost precisely 3:1. The mass-ratio of the *Viking* rocket, of less overall weight, is very close to 4:1.

In step rockets, the final velocities attained by the various steps add up, which has the same result as if the mass-ratios were multiplied. Imagine that the lower step is a V-2 with its 3:1 mass-ratio and that the payload carried is a smaller rocket, which also has a mass-

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ratio of 3:1. The final velocity reached by the second step is equivalent to a rocket of the mass-ratio of 9:1.

But a mass-ratio of 9:1 would strain the resources and the ingenuity of the designing engineer to the utmost, while it is comparatively easy to build two rockets, each with a mass-ratio of 3:1.

Having read a great deal about gigantic stars like Mira, I wonder which star is regarded as the smallest star. Also, if we found a lonely body in space which is not luminous, would it be called a planet because it does not shine or would it be called a dead star if it is big enough?

Gerd Lipschitz
Trenton, N. J.

For a number of years, a star catalogued as "BD + 4° 4048," discovered at the McDonald Observatory, Texas, was believed to be the faintest known star. It *was*, in fact, the faintest known star from 1944 until 1952, when Drs. Luyten and Carpenter, working at the Steward Observatory, Arizona, established a still fainter star. Its luminosity is so low that 60,000 of its kind would be needed to give off as much light as our sun. And its diameter is only about 300 miles larger than the diameter of our moon, which is 2160 miles. But this tiny star, catalogued as L886-6, has 40 per cent more mass than our sun, which means that its density must be some 55 million times the density of water!

As for your second question, it is this high density that would be used as a criterion when a large dark body is found. If this body, as you specify, is not luminous, but had such a high density, it would obviously be a dead star. If it had a density comparable to that of the planets, which ranges from not quite 1 for Saturn to 5.5 for Earth, it would have to be considered a planet that was somehow torn from its sun.

Whether there are actually non-luminous dead stars is doubtful. The so-called superdense "White Dwarfs," of which the two faint stars mentioned above are examples, are regarded as the end of stellar evolution and may be called "dead" in the sense that they no longer generate energy and have nothing left with which to do so. But they are still hot because they have not yet had time to cool off and turn dark in the process. Because of their large (and hot) mass and their small surface area, they cool very slowly.

The time needed to cool is estimated to be longer than the

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present age of our universe. If this reasoning is correct, as it appears to be in the light of present knowledge, no star has been able to cool to temperatures below visibility.

I have just read your article on the "Trojan Planets" and would like it very much if you wrote an article on the moons of Jupiter. All I know about them are the names of the four largest ones. What are the names, sizes and distances of the others?

John Slivka
58 Greenwood Avenue
Lackawanna 18, N. Y.

The moons of Jupiter, except for the four largest, which have been known since 1610, have never been named. They are designated by Roman numerals preceded by a J. Because they are numbered in the order of discovery, their sequence, counting from Jupiter outward, reads J-V, J-I (Io), J-II (Europa), J-III (Ganymede), J-IV (Callisto), J-VI, J-VII, J-X, J-XI, J-VIII, J-IX, J-XII.

Jupiter's moons clearly form two main groups, with J-V as a special case defying classification. J-V is only 112,600 miles from the planet, needs half a day for one complete revolution and has a diameter of about 100 miles.

Then comes the inner group of moons, those which have names. They are big. Io has a diameter of 2300 miles, Europa a diameter of 2000 miles, and Ganymede and Callisto are of equal size, 3200 miles in diameter (200 miles more than Mercury). Their distances are, respectively, 261,800, 416,600, 664,200 and 1,169,000 miles, and their periods of revolution 1.77, 3.55, 7.15 and 16.7 days, respectively.

The outer moons are all rather small and again form two groups. J-VI, J-VII and J-X are between 7,100,000 and 7,350,000 miles from the planet, needing between 250 and 260 days for one revolution. J-VI has a diameter of 100 miles, the other two less than 50 miles apiece.

Another group is formed by J-XI, J-VIII, J-IX and J-XII, all small bodies of less than 50 miles in diameter at distances of between 14 and 14.9 million miles from Jupiter. Their periods of revolution are between 660 and 760 days.

In all probability, the group or groups of outer moons are far more numerous than we know, but the other members are too small to be discovered from Earth.

—WILLY LEY

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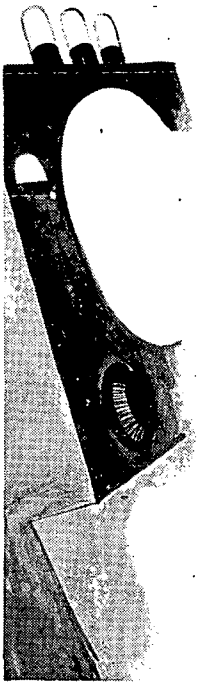
HANDS OFF

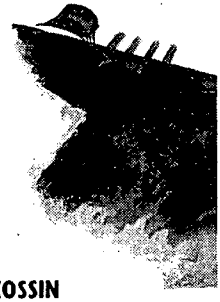
By ROBERT SHECKLEY



Endeavor I was a space jalopy. Endeavor II was a dreamboat—with built-in nightmares!

THE ship's mass detector flared pink, then red. Agee had been dozing at the controls, waiting for Victor to finish making dinner. Now he looked up quickly. "Planet coming," he called, over the hiss of escaping air.

Captain Barnett nodded. He finished shaping a hot patch, and slapped it on *Endeavor*'s worn hull. The whistle of escaping air dropped to a low moan, but was not entirely stopped. It never was.



Illustrated by KOSSIN

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When Barnett came over, the planet was just visible beyond the rim of a little red sun. It glowed green against the black night of space and gave both men an identical thought.

Barnett put the thought into words. "Wonder if there's anything on it worth taking," he said, frowning.

Agee lifted a white eyebrow hopefully. They watched as the dials began to register.

They would never have spotted the planet if they had taken *Endeavor* along the South Galactic Trades. But the Confederacy Police were becoming increasingly numerous along that route and Barnett preferred to give them a wide berth.

The *Endeavor* was listed as a trader—but the only cargo she carried consisted of several bottles of an extremely powerful acid used in opening safes, and three medium-sized atomic bombs. The authorities looked with disfavor upon such goods and they were always trying to haul in the crew on some old charge—a murder on Luna, larceny on Omega, breaking and entering on Samia II. Old, almost forgotten crimes that the police drearily insisted on raking up.

To make matters worse, *Endeavor* was outgunned by the newer police cruisers. So they had taken an outside route to New Athens, where a big uranium strike had opened.

"DON'T look like much," Agee commented, inspecting the dials critically.

"Might as well pass it by," Barnett said.

The readings were uninteresting. They showed a planet smaller than Earth, uncharted, and with no commercial value other than oxygen atmosphere.

As they swung past, their heavy-metals detector came to life.

"There's stuff down there!" Agee said, quickly interpreting the multiple readings. "Pure. *Very* pure—and on the surface!"

He looked at Barnett, who nodded. The ship swung toward the planet.

Victor came from the rear, wearing a tiny wool cap crammed on his big shaven head. He stared over Barnett's shoulder as Agee brought the ship down in a tight spiral. Within half a mile of the surface, they saw their deposit of heavy metal.

It was a spaceship, resting on its tail in a natural clearing.

"Now *this* is interesting," Barnett said. He motioned Agee to make a closer approach.

Agee brought the ship down with deft skill. He was well past the compulsory retirement limit for master pilots, but it didn't

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affect his coordination. Barnett, who found him stranded and penniless, had signed him on. The captain was always glad to help another human, if it was convenient and likely to be profitable. The two men shared the same attitude toward private property, but sometimes disagreed on ways of acquiring it. Agee preferred a sure thing. Barnett, on the other hand, had more courage than was good for a member of a relatively frail species like *Homo sapiens*.

Near the surface of the planet, they saw that the strange ship was larger than *Endeavor* and bright, shining new. The hull shape was unfamiliar, as were the markings.

"Ever see anything like it?" Barnett asked.

Agee searched his capacious memory. "Looks a bit like a Cephean job, only they don't build 'em so squat. We're pretty far out, you know. That ship might not even be from the Confederacy."

Victor stared at the ship, his big lips parted in wonder. He sighed noisily. "We could sure use a ship like that, huh, Captain?"

Barnett's sudden smile was like a crack appearing in granite. "Victor," he said, "in your simplicity, you have gone to the heart of the matter. We *could* use a ship like that. Let's go down and talk with its skipper."

Before strapping in, Victor made sure the freeze-blasters were on full charge.

ON the ground, they sent up an orange and green parley flare, but there was no answer from the alien ship. The planet's atmosphere tested breathable, with a temperature of 72 degrees Fahrenheit. After waiting a few minutes, they marched out, freeze-blasters ready under their jumpers.

All three men wore studiously pleasant smiles as they walked the fifty yards between ships.

Up close, the ship was magnificent. Its glistening silver-gray hide had hardly been touched by meteor strikes. The airlock was open and a low hum told them that the generators were recharging.

"Anyone home?" Victor shouted into the airlock. His voice echoed hollowly through the ship. There was no answer—only the soft hum of the generators and the rustle of grass on the plain.

"Where do you suppose they went?" Agee asked.

"For a breath of air, probably," Barnett said. "I don't suppose they'd expect any visitors."

Victor placidly sat down on the ground. Barnett and Agee prowled around the base of the

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ship, admiring its great drive ports.

"Think you can handle it?" Barnett asked.

"I don't see why not," Agee said. "For one thing, it's conventional drive. The servos don't matter — oxygen-breathers use similar drive-control systems. It's just a matter of time until I figure it out."

"Someone coming," Victor called.

They hurried back to the airlock. Three hundred yards from the ship was a ragged forest. A figure had just emerged from among the trees, and was walking toward them.

Agee and Victor drew their blasters simultaneously.

Barnett's binoculars resolved the tiny figure into a rectangular shape, about two feet high by a foot wide. The alien was less than two inches thick and had no head.

Barnett frowned. He had never seen a rectangle floating above tall grass.

Adjusting the binoculars, he saw that the alien was roughly humanoid. That is, it had four limbs. Two, almost hidden by the grass, were being used for walking, and the other two jutted stiffly into the air. In its middle, Barnett could just make out two tiny eyes and a mouth. The creature was not wearing any sort of suit or helmet.

"Queer-looking," Agee muttered, adjusting the aperture of his blaster. "Suppose he's all there is?"

"Hope so," Barnett said, drawing his own blaster.

"Range about two hundred yards." Agee leveled his weapon, then looked up. "Did you want to talk to him first, Captain?"

"What's there to say?" Barnett asked, smiling lazily. "Let him get a little closer, though. We don't want to miss."

Agee nodded and kept the alien steadily in his sights.

KALEN had stopped at this deserted little world, hoping to blast out a few tons of erol, a mineral highly prized by the Mabogian people. He had had no luck. The unused thetnite bomb was still lodged in his body pouch, next to a stray kerla nut. He would have to return to Mabog with ballast instead of cargo.

Well, he thought, emerging from the forest, better luck next—

He was shocked to see a thin, strangely tapered spaceship near his own. He had never expected to find anyone else on this deadly little world.

And the inhabitants were waiting in front of his own airlock! Kalen saw at once they were roughly Mabogian in form. There was a race much like them in the Mabogian Union, but their space-

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ships were completely different. Intuition suggested that these aliens might well be representatives of that great civilization rumored to be on the periphery of the Galaxy.

He advanced eagerly to meet them.

Strange, the aliens were not moving. Why didn't they come forward to meet him? He knew that they saw him, because all three were pointing at him.

He walked faster, realizing that he knew nothing of their customs. He only hoped that they didn't run to long drawn-out ceremonies. Even an hour on this inimical world had tired him. He was hungry, badly in need of a shower . . .

Something intensely cold jarred him backward. He looked around apprehensively. Was this some unknown property of the planet?

He moved forward again. Another bolt lanced into him, frosting the outer layer of his hide.

This was serious. Mabogians were among the toughest lifeforms in the Galaxy, but they had their limits. Kalen looked around for the source of the trouble.

THE aliens were *shooting* at him!

For a moment, his thinking centers refused to accept the evidence of his senses. Kalen knew what murder was. He had observed this perversity with stunned horror among certain debased animal forms. And, of course, there were the abnormal psychology books, which documented every case of premeditated murder that had occurred in the history of Mabog.

But to have such a thing actually happen to *him!* Kalen was unable to believe it.

Another bolt lanced into him. Kalen stood still, trying to convince himself that this was really happening. He couldn't understand how creatures with sufficient sense of cooperation to run a spaceship could be capable of *murder.*

Besides, they didn't even know him!

Almost too late, Kalen whirled and ran toward the forest. All three aliens were firing now and the grass around him was crackling white with frost. His skin surface was completely frosted over. Cold was something the Mabogian constitution was not designed for and the chill was creeping into his internal organs.

But he could still hardly believe it.

Kalen reached the forest and a double blast caught him as he slid behind a tree. He could feel his internal system laboring desperately to restore warmth to his

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body and, with profound regret, he allowed the darkness to take him.

"STUPID kind of alien," Agee observed, holstering his blaster.

"Stupid and strong," Barnett said. "But no oxygen-breather can take much of that." He grinned proudly and slapped the silver-gray side of the ship. "We'll christen her *Endeavor II*."

"Three cheers for the captain!" Victor cried enthusiastically.

"Save your breath," Barnett said. "You'll need it." He glanced overhead. "We've got about four hours of light left. Victor, transfer the food, oxygen and tools from *Endeavor I* and disarm her piles. We'll come back and salvage the old girl some day. But I want to blast off by sundown."

Victor hurried off. Barnett and Agee entered the ship.

The rear half of *Endeavor II* was filled with generators, engines, converters, servos, fuel and air tanks. Past that was an enormous cargo hold, occupying almost another half of the ship. It was filled with nuts of all shapes and colors, ranging in size from two inches in diameter to some twice the size of a man's head. That left only two compartments in the bow of the ship.

The first should have been a crew room, since it was the only available living space. But it was completely bare. There were no deceleration cots, no tables or chairs — nothing but polished metal floor. In the walls and ceiling were several small openings, but their purpose was not readily apparent.

Connected to this room was the pilot's compartment. It was very small, barely large enough for one man, and the panel under the observation blister was packed solidly with instruments.

"It's all yours," Barnett said. "Let's see what you can do."

Agee nodded, looked for a chair, then squatted in front of the panel. He began to study the layout.

In several hours, Victor had transferred all their stores to *Endeavor II*. Agee still had not touched anything. He was trying to figure out what controlled what, from the size, color, shape and location of the instruments. It wasn't easy, even accepting similar nervous systems and patterns of thought. Did the auxiliary step-up system run from left to right? If not, he would have to unlearn his previous flight coordination. Did red signify danger to the designers of this ship? If it did, that big switch could be for dumping fuel. But red could also mean hot fuel, in which case the switch might control coarse energy flow.

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For all he knew, its purpose was to overload the piles in case of enemy attack.

Agee kept all this in mind as he studied the controls. He wasn't too worried. For one thing, spaceships were tough beasts, practically indestructible from the inside. For another, he believed he had caught onto the pattern.

BARNETT stuck his head in the doorway, with Victor close behind him. "You ready?"

Agee looked over the panel. "Guess so." He touched a dial lightly. "This *should* control the airlocks."

He turned it. Victor and Barnett waited, perspiring, in the chilly room.

They heard the smooth flow of lubricated metal. The airlocks had closed.

Agee grinned and blew on his fingertips for luck. "Here's the air-control system." He closed a switch.

Out of the ceiling, a yellow smoke began to trickle.

"Impurities in the system," Agee muttered, adjusting a dial. Victor began to cough.

"Turn it off," Barnet said.

The smoke poured out in thick streams, filling the two rooms almost instantly.

"*Turn it off!*"

"I can't see it!" Agee thrust at the switch, missed and struck a button under it. Immediately the generators began to whine angrily. Blue sparks danced along the panel and jumped to the wall.

Agee staggered back from the panel and collapsed. Victor was already at the door to the cargo hold, trying to hammer it down with his fists. Barnett covered his mouth with one hand and rushed to the panel. He fumbled blindly for the switch, feeling the ship revolve giddily around him.

Victor fell to the deck, still beating feebly at the door.

Barnett jabbed blindly at the panel.

Instantly the generators stopped. Then Barnett felt a cold breeze on his face. He wiped his streaming eyes and looked up.

A lucky stab had closed the ceiling vents, cutting off the yellow gas. He had accidentally opened the locks, and the gas in the ship was being replaced by the cold night air of the planet. Soon the atmosphere was breathable.

Victor climbed shakily to his feet, but Agee didn't move. Barnett gave the old pilot artificial respiration, cursing softly as he did. Agee's eyelids finally fluttered and his chest began to rise and fall. A few minutes later, he sat up and shook his head.

"What *was* that stuff?" Victor asked.

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"I'm afraid," Barnet said, "that our alien friend considered it a breathable atmosphere."

AGEE shook his head. "Can't be, Captain. He was here on an oxygen world, walking around with no helmet—"

"Air requirements vary tremendously," Barnett pointed out. "Let's face it—our friend's physical makeup was quite different from ours."

"That's not so good," Agee said.

The three men looked at each other. In the silence that followed, they heard a faint, ominous sound.

"What was that?" Victor yelped, yanking out his blaster.

"Shut up!" Barnett shouted.

They listened. Barnett could feel the hairs lift on the back of his neck as he tried to identify the sound.

It came from a distance. It sounded like metal striking a hard non-metallic object.

The three men looked out the port. In the last glow of sunset, the could see the main port of *Endeavor I* was open. The sound was coming from the ship.

"It's impossible," Agee said. "The freeze-blasters—"

"Didn't kill him," Barnett finished.

"That's bad," Agee grunted. "That's very bad."

Victor was still holding his blaster. "Captain, suppose I wander over that way—"

Barnett shook his head. "He wouldn't let you within ten feet of the lock. No, let me think. Was there anything on board he could use? The piles?"

"I've got the links, Captain," Victor said.

"Good. Then there's nothing that—"

"The acid," Agee interrupted. "It's powerful stuff. But I don't suppose he can do much with that stuff."

"Not a thing," Barnett said. "We're in this ship and we're staying here. But get it off the ground now."

Agee looked at the instrument panel. Half an hour ago, he had almost understood it. Now it was a cunningly rigged death trap—a booby trap, with invisible wires leading to destruction.

The trap was unintentional. But a spaceship was necessarily a machine for living as well as traveling. The controls would try to reproduce the alien's living conditions, supply his needs.

That might be fatal to them.

"I wish I knew what kind of planet he came from," Agee said unhappily. If they knew the alien's environment, they could anticipate what his ship would do.

All they knew was that he breathed a poisonous yellow gas.

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"We're doing all right," Barnett said, without much confidence. "Just dope out the drive mechanism and we'll leave everything else alone."

Agee turned back to the controls.

Barnett wished he knew what the alien was up to. He stared at the bulk of his old ship in the twilight and listened to the incomprehensible sound of metal striking non-metal.

KALEN was surprised to find that he was still alive. But there was a saying among his people—"Either a Mabogian is killed fast or he isn't killed at all." It was not at all—so far.

Groggily, he sat up and leaned against a tree. The single red sun of the planet was low on the horizon and breezes of poisonous oxygen swirled around him. He tested at once and found that his lungs were still securely sealed. His life-giving yellow air, although vitiated from long use, was still sustaining him.

But he couldn't seem to get oriented. A few hundred yards away, his ship was resting peacefully. The fading red light glistened from its hull and, for a moment, Kalen was convinced that there were no aliens. He had imagined the whole thing and now he would return to his ship . . .

He saw one of the aliens, loaded down with goods, enter his vessel. In a little while, the airlocks closed.

It was true, all of it. He wrenched his mind back to grim realities.

He needed food and air badly. His outer skin was dry and cracked, and in need of nutritional cleaning. But food, air and cleansers were on his lost ship. All he had was a single red kerla nut and the thetnite bomb in his body pouch.

If he could open and eat the nut, he could regain a little strength. But how could he open it?

It was shocking, how complete his dependence on machinery had been! Now he would have to find some way of doing the most simple, ordinary, everyday things—the sort of things his ship had done automatically, without the operator even thinking about them.

Kalen noticed that the aliens had apparently abandoned their own ship. Why? It didn't matter. Out on the plain, he would die before morning. His only chance for survival lay inside their ship.

He slid slowly through the grass, stopping only when a wave of dizziness swept over him. He tried to keep watch on his ship. If the aliens came after him now,

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all would be lost. But nothing happened. After an eternity of crawling, he reached the ship and slipped inside.

It was twilight. In the dimness, he could see that the vessel was old. The walls, too thin in the first place, had been patched and repatched. Everything spoke of long, hard use.

He could understand why they wanted his ship.

Another wave of dizziness swept over him. It was his body's way of demanding immediate attention.

Food seemed to be the first problem. He slipped the kerla nut out of his pouch. It was round, almost four inches in diameter, and its hide was two inches thick. Nuts of this sort were the main ingredient of a Mabogian spaceman's diet. They were energy-packed and would last almost forever, sealed.

He propped the nut against a wall, found a steel bar and smashed down on it. The bar, striking the nut, emitted a hollow, drum-like sound. The nut was undamaged.

Kalen wondered if the sound could be heard by the aliens. He would have to chance it. Setting himself firmly, he flailed away. In fifteen minutes, he was exhausted and the bar was bent almost in half.

The nut was undamaged.

HE was unable to open the nut without a Cracker, a standard device on every Mabogian ship. No one ever thought of opening a nut in any other way.

It was terrifying evidence of his helplessness.

He lifted the bar for another whack and found that his limbs were stiffening. He dropped the bar and took stock.

His chilled outer hide was hampering his motions. The skin was hardening slowly into impervious horn. Once the hardening was completed, he would be immobilized. Frozen in position, he would sit or stand until he died of suffocation.

Kalen fought back a wave of despair and tried to think. He had to treat his skin without delay. That was more important than food. On board ship, he would wash and bathe it, soften it and eventually cure it. But it was doubtful whether the aliens carried the proper cleansers.

The only other course was to rip off his outer hide. The second layer would be tender for a few days, but at least he would be mobile.

He searched on stiffening limbs for a Changer. Then he realized that the aliens wouldn't have even this piece of basic apparatus. He was still on his own.

He took the steel bar, bent it into a hook and inserted the

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point under a fold of skin. He yanked upward with all his strength.

His skin refused to yield.

Next, he wedged himself between a generator and the wall and inserted the hook in a different way. But his arms weren't long enough to gain leverage, and the tough hide held stubbornly.

He tried a dozen different positions, unsuccessfully. Without mechanical assistance, he couldn't hold himself rigidly enough.

Wearily, he dropped the bar. He could do nothing, nothing at all. Then he remembered the thetnite bomb in his pouch.

A primitive part of his mind which he had not previously known existed said that there was an easy way out of all this. He could slip the bomb under the hull of his ship, while the aliens weren't looking. The light charge would do no more than throw the ship twenty or thirty feet into the air, but would not really damage it.

The aliens, however, would undoubtedly be killed.

Kalen was horrified. How could he think such a thing? The Mabogian ethic, ingrained in the fiber of his being, forbade the taking of intelligent life for any reason whatsoever. *Any* reason.

"But wouldn't this be justified?" that primitive portion of his mind whispered. "These aliens are diseased. You would be doing the Universe a favor by getting rid of them and only incidentally helping yourself. Don't think of it as murder. Consider it extermination."

He took the bomb out of his pouch and looked at it, then hastily put it away. "No!" he told himself, with less conviction.

He refused to think any more. On tired, almost rigid limbs, he began to search the alien ship, looking for something that would save his life.

AGEE was crouched in the pilot's compartment, wearily marking switches with an indelible pencil. His lungs ached and he had been working all night. Now there was a bleak gray dawn outside and a chill wind was whipping around *Endeavor II*. The spaceship was lighted but cold, for Agee didn't want to touch the temperature controls.

Victor came into the crew room, staggering under the weight of a heavy packing case.

"Barnett?" Agee called out.

"He's coming," Victor said.

The captain wanted all their equipment up front, where they could get at it quickly. But the crew room was small and he had used most of the available space.

Looking around for a spot to

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put the case, Victor noticed a door in one wall. He pressed its stud and the door slid smartly into the ceiling, revealing a room the size of a closet. Victor decided it would make an ideal storage space.

Ignoring the crushed red shells on the floor, he slid the case inside.

Immediately, the ceiling of the little room began to descend.

Victor let out a yell that could be heard throughout the ship. He leaped up—and slammed his head against the ceiling. He fell on his face, stunned..

Agee rushed out of the pilot's compartment and Barnett sprinted into the room. Barnett grabbed Victor's legs and tried to drag him out, but Victor was heavy and the captain was unable to get a purchase on the smooth metal floor.

With rare presence of mind, Agee up-ended the packing case. The ceiling was momentarily stopped by it.

Together, Barnett and Agee tugged at Victor's legs. They managed to drag him out just in time. The heavy case splintered and, in another moment, was crushed like a piece of balsa wood.

The ceiling of the little room, descending on a greased shaft, compressed the packing case to a six-inch thickness. Then its gears clicked and it slid back into place without a sound.

VICTOR sat up and rubbed his head. "Captain," he said plaintively, "can't we get our own ship back?"

Agee was doubtful of the venture, too. He looked at the deadly little room, which again resembled a closet with crushed red shells on the floor.

"Sure seems like a jinx ship," he said worriedly. "Maybe Victor's right."

"You want to give her up?" Barnett asked.

Agee squirmed uncomfortably and nodded. "Trouble is," he said, not looking at Barnett, "we don't know what she'll do next. It's just too risky, Captain."

"Do you realize what you'd be giving up?" Barnett challenged. "Her hull alone is worth a fortune. Have you looked at her engines? There's nothing this side of Earth that could stop her. She could drill her way through a planet and come out the other side with all her paint on. And you want to give her up!"

"She won't be worth much if she kills us," Agee objected.

Victor nodded emphatically. Barnett stared at them.

"Now listen to me carefully," Barnett said. "We are *not* going to give up this ship. She is *not* jinxed. She's alien and filled with

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alien apparatus. All we have to do is keep our hands off things until we reach drydock. Understand?"

Agee wanted to say something about closets that turned into hydraulic presses. It didn't seem to him a promising sign for the future. But, looking at Barnett's face, he decided against it.

"Have you marked all the operating controls?" Barnett asked.

"Just a few more to go," Agee said.

"Right. Finish up and those are the only ones we'll touch. If we leave the rest of the ship alone, she'll leave us alone. There's no danger if we just keep *hands off*."

Barnett wiped perspiration from his face, leaned against a wall and unbuttoned his coat.

Immediately, two metal bands slid out of openings on either side of him and circled his waist and stomach.

Barnett stared at them for a moment, then threw himself forward with all his strength. The bands didn't give. There was a peculiar clicking sound in the walls and a slender wire filament slid out. It touched Barnett's coat appraisingly, then retreated into the wall.

Agee and Victor stared helplessly.

"Turn it off," Barnett said tensely.

Agee rushed into the control room. Victor continued staring. Out of the wall slid a metal limb, tipped with a glittering three-inch blade.

"*Stop it!*" Barnett screamed.

Victor unfroze. He ran up and tried to wrench the metal limb out of the wall. It twisted once and sent him reeling across the room.

WITH the precision of a surgeon, the knife slit Barnett's coat down the middle, not touching the shirt underneath. Then the limb slid out of sight.

Agee was punching controls now and the generators whined, the locks opened and closed, stabilizers twitched, lights flickered. The mechanism that held Barnett was unaffected.

The slender filament returned. It touched Barnett's shirt and paused an instant. The internal mechanism chittered alarmingly. The filament touched Barnett's shirt again, as if unsure of its function in his case.

Agee shouted from the control room, "I can't turn it off! It must be fully automatic!"

The filament slid into the wall. It disappeared and the knife-tipped limb slid out.

By this time, Victor had located a heavy wrench. He rushed over, swung it above his head and smashed it against the limb,

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narrowly missing Barnett's head.

The limb was not even dented. Serenely, it cut Barnett's shirt from his back, leaving him naked to the waist.

Barnett was not hurt, but his eyes rolled wildly as the filament came out. Victor put his fist in his mouth and backed away. Agee shut his eyes.

The filament touched Barnett's warm living flesh, clucked approvingly and slid back into the wall. The bands opened. Barnett tumbled to his knees.

For a while, no one spoke. There was nothing to say. Barnett stared moodily into space. Victor started to crack his knuckles over and over again, until Agee nudged him.

The old pilot was trying to figure out why the mechanism had slit Barnett's clothing and then stopped when it reached living flesh. Was this the way the alien undressed himself? It didn't make sense. But then, the press-closet didn't make sense, either.

In a way, he was glad it had happened. It must have taught Barnett something. Now they would leave this jinxed monstrosity and figure out a way of regaining their own ship.

"Get me a shirt," Barnett said. Victor hurriedly found one for him. Barnett slipped it on, staying clear of the walls. "How soon can you get this ship moving?"

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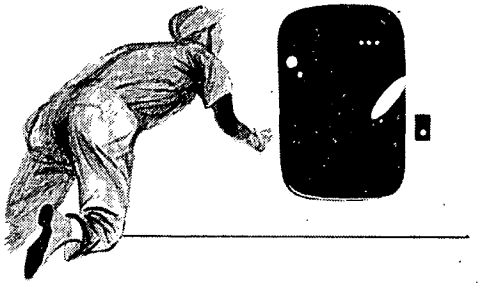

he asked Agee, a bit unsteadily.

"*What?*"

"You heard me."

"Haven't you had enough?" Agee gasped.

"No. How soon can we blast out?"

"About another hour," Agee grumbled. What else could he say? The captain was just too much. Wearily, Agee returned to the control room.

Barnett put a sweater over the shirt and a coat over that. It was chilly in the room and he had begun to shiver violently.

KALEN lay motionless on the deck of the alien ship. Foolishly, he had wasted most of his remaining strength in trying to rip off his stiff outer hide. But the hide grew progressively tougher as he grew weaker. Now it seemed hardly worthwhile to move. Better to rest and feel his internal fires burn lower . . .

Soon he was dreaming of the ridged hills of Mabog and the great port of Canthanope, where the interstellar traders swung down with their strange cargoes. He was there in twilight, looking over the flat roofs at the two great setting suns. But why were they setting together in the south, the blue sun and the yellow? How could they set together in the south? A physical impossibility. . . . Perhaps his father could ex-

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plain it, for it was rapidly growing dark.

He shook himself out of the fantasy and stared at the grim light of morning. This was not the way for a Mabogian spaceman to die. He would try again.

After half an hour of slow, painful searching, he found a sealed metal box in the rear of the ship. The aliens had evidently overlooked it. He wrenched off the top. Inside were several bottles, carefully fastened and padded against shock. Kalen lifted one and examined it.

It was marked with a large white symbol. There was no reason why he should know the symbol, but it seemed faintly familiar. He searched his memory, trying to recall where he had seen it.

Then, hazily, he remembered. It was a representation of a humanoid skull. There was one humanoid race in the Mabogian Union and he had seen replicas of their skulls in a museum.

But why would anyone put such a thing on a bottle?

To Kalen, a skull conveyed an emotion of reverence. This must be what the manufacturers had intended. He opened the bottle and sniffed.

The odor was interesting. It reminded him of—

Skin-cleansing solution!

Without further delay, he poured the entire bottle over himself. Hardly daring to hope, he waited. If he could put his skin back into working order . . .

Yes, the liquid in the skull-marked bottle *was* a mild cleanser! It was pleasantly scented, too.

He poured another bottle over his armored hide and felt the nutritious fluid seep in. His body, starved for nourishment, called eagerly for more. He drained another bottle.

FOR a long time, Kalen just lay back and let the life-giving fluid soak in. His skin loosened and became pliable. He could feel a new surge of energy within him, a new will to live.

He *would* live!

After the bath, Kalen examined the spaceship's controls, hoping to pilot the old crate back to Mabog. There were immediate difficulties. For some reason, the piloting controls weren't sealed into a separate room. He wondered why not? Those strange creatures couldn't have turned their whole ship into a deceleration chamber. They couldn't! There wasn't enough tank space to hold the fluid.

It was perplexing, but everything about the aliens was perplexing. He could overcome that difficulty. But when Kalen inspected the engines, he saw that a vital link had been removed

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from the piles. They were useless.

That left only one alternative. He had to win back his own ship.

But how?

He paced the deck restlessly. The Mabogian ethic forbade killing intelligent life, and there were no ifs or buts about it. Under no circumstances — not even to save your own life—were you allowed to kill. It was a wise rule and had served Mabog well. By strict adherence to it, the Mabogians had avoided war for three thousand years and had trained their people to a high degree of civilization. Which would have been impossible had they allowed exceptions to creep in. Ifs and buts could erode the soundest of principles.

He could not be a backslider.

But was he going to die here passively?

Looking down, Kalen was surprised to see that a puddle of cleaning solution had eaten a hole in the deck. How flimsily these ships were made—even a mild cleaning solution could damage one! The aliens themselves must be very weak.

One thetnite bomb could do it.

He walked to the port. No one seemed to be on guard. He supposed they were too busy preparing for takeoff. It would be easy to slide through the grass, up to his ship . . .

And no one on Mabog would ever have to know about it.

Kalen found, to his surprise, that he had covered almost half the distance between ships without realizing it. Strange, how his body could do things without his mind being aware of it.

He took out the bomb and crawled another twenty feet.

Because after all—taking the long view—what difference would this killing make?

"AREN'T you ready yet?" Barnett asked, at noon.

"I guess so," Agee said. He looked over the marked panel. "As ready as I'll ever be."

Barnett nodded. "Victor and I will strap down in the crew room. Take off under minimum acceleration."

Barnett returned to the crew room. Agee fastened the straps he had rigged and rubbed his hands together nervously. As far as he knew, all the essential controls were marked. Everything should go all right. He hoped.

For there were that closet and the knife. It was anyone's guess what this insane ship would do next.

"Ready out here," Barnett called from the crew room.

"All right. About ten seconds." He closed and sealed the airlocks. His door closed automatically, cutting him off from the

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crew room. Feeling a slight touch of claustrophobia, Agee activated the piles. Everything was fine so far.

There was a thin slick of oil on the deck. Agee decided it was from a loose joint and ignored it. The control surfaces worked beautifully. He punched a course into the ship's tape and activated the flight controls.

Then he felt something lapping against his foot. Looking down, he was amazed to see that thick, evil-smelling oil was almost three inches deep on the deck. It was quite a leak. He couldn't understand how a ship as well built as this could have such a flaw. Unstrapping himself, he groped for the source.

He found it. There were four small vents in the deck and each of them was feeding a smooth, even flow of oil.

Agee punched the stud that opened his door and found that it remained sealed. Refusing to grow panicky, he examined the door with care.

It *should* open.

It didn't.

The oil was almost up to his knees.

He grinned foolishly. Stupid of him! The pilot room was sealed from the control board. He pressed the release and went back to the door.

It still refused to open.

Agee tugged at it with all his strength, but it wouldn't budge. He waded back to the control panel. There had been no oil when they found the ship. That meant there had to be a drain somewhere.

THE oil was waist-deep before he found it. Quickly the oil disappeared. Once it was gone, the door opened easily.

"What's the matter?" Barnett asked.

Agee told him.

"So that's how he does it," Barnett said quietly. "Glad I found out."

"Does what?" Agee asked, feeling that Barnett was taking the whole thing too lightly.

"How he stands the acceleration of takeoff. It bothered me. He hadn't anything on board that resembled a bed or cot. No chairs, nothing to strap into. So he floats in the oil bath, which turns on automatically when the ship is prepared for flight."

"But why wouldn't the door open?" Agee asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" Barnett said, smiling patiently. "He wouldn't want oil all over the ship. And he wouldn't want it to drain out accidentally."

"We can't take off," Agee insisted.

"Why not?"

"Because I can't breathe very

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well under oil. It turns on automatically with the power and there's no way of turning it off."

"Use your head," Barnett told him. "Just tie down the drain switch. The oil will be carried away as fast as it comes in."

"Yeah, I hadn't thought of that," Agee admitted unhappily.

"Go ahead, then."

"I want to change my clothes first."

"No. Get this damned ship off the ground."

"But, Captain—"

"Get her moving," Barnett ordered. "For all we know, that alien is planning something."

Agee shrugged his shoulders, returned to the pilot room and strapped in.

"Ready?"

"Yes, get her moving."

He tied down the drain circuit and the oil flowed safely in and out, not rising higher than the tops of his shoes. He activated all the controls without further incident.

"Here goes." He set minimum acceleration and blew on his fingertips for luck.

Then he punched the blast-switch.

WITH profound regret, Kalen watched his ship depart. He was still holding the thetnite bomb in his hand.

He had reached his ship, had even stood under her for a few seconds. Then he had crept back to the alien vessel. He had been unable to set the bomb. Centuries of conditioning were too much to overcome in a few hours.

Conditioning — and something more.

Few individuals of any race murder for pleasure. There are perfectly adequate reasons to kill, though, reasons which might satisfy any philosopher.

But, once accepted, there are more reasons, and more and more. And murder, once accepted, is hard to stop. It leads irresistibly to war and, from there, to annihilation.

Kalen felt that this murder somehow involved the destiny of his race. His abstinence had been almost a matter of race-survival.

But it didn't make him feel any better.

He watched his ship dwindle to a dot in the sky. The aliens were leaving at a ridiculously slow speed. He could think of no reason for this, unless they were doing it for his benefit.

Undoubtedly they were sadistic enough for that.

Kalen returned to the ship. His will to live was as strong as ever. He had no intention of giving up. He would hang onto life as long as he could, hoping for the one chance in a million that would bring another ship to this planet.

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Looking around, he thought that he might concoct an air-substitute out of the skull-marked cleanser. It would sustain him for a day or two. Then, if he could open the kerla nut . . .

He thought he heard a noise outside and rushed to look. The sky was empty. His ship had vanished, and he was alone.

He returned to the alien ship and set about the serious business of staying alive.

AS Agee recovered consciousness, he found that he had managed to cut the acceleration in half, just before passing out. This was the only thing that had saved his life.

And the acceleration, hovering just above zero on the dial, was still unbearably heavy! Agee unsealed the door and crawled out.

Barnett and Victor had burst their straps on the takeoff. Victor was just returning to consciousness. Barnett picked himself out of a pile of smashed cases.

"Do you think you're flying in a circus?" he complained. "I told you *minimum acceleration*."

"I started *under* minimum acceleration," Agee said. "Go read the tape for yourself."

Barnett marched to the control room. He came out quickly.

"That's bad. Our alien friend operates this ship at three times our acceleration."

"That's the way it looks."

"I hadn't thought of that," Barnett said thoughtfully. "He must come from a heavy planet —a place where you have to blast out at high speed, if you expect to get out at all."

"What hit me?" Victor groaned, rubbing his head.

There was a clicking in the walls. The ship was fully awake now, and its servos turned on automatically.

"Getting warm, isn't it?" Victor asked.

"Yeah, and thick," Agee said. "Pressure buildup." He went back to the control room. Barnett and Victor stood anxiously in the doorway, waiting.

"I can't turn it off," Agee said, wiping perspiration from his streaming face. "The temperature and pressure are automatic. They must go to 'normal' as soon as the ship is in flight."

"You damn well better turn them off," Barnett told him. "We'll fry in here if you don't."

"There's no way."

"He must have some kind of heat regulation."

"Sure — there!" Agee said, pointing. "The control is already set at its lowest point."

"WHAT do you suppose his normal temperature is?" Barnett asked.

"I'd hate to find out," Agee

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said. "This ship is built of extremely high melting-point alloys. It's constructed to withstand ten times the pressure of an Earth ship. Put those together . . ."

"You must be able to turn it off somewhere!" Barnett said. He peeled off his jacket and sweater. The heat was mounting rapidly and the deck was becoming too hot to stand on.

"Turn it *off!*" Victor howled.

"Wait a minute," Agee said. "*I* didn't build this ship, you know. How should I know—"

"*Off!*" Victor screamed, shaking Agee up and down like a rag doll. "*Off!*"

"Let go!" Agee half-drew his blaster. Then, in a burst of inspiration, he turned off the ship's engines.

The clicking in the walls stopped. The room began to cool.

"What happened?" Victor asked.

"The temperature and pressure fall when the power is off," Agee said. "We're safe—as long as we don't run the engines."

"How long will it take us to coast to a port?" Barnett asked.

Agee figured it out. "About three years," he said. "We're pretty far out."

"Isn't there any way we can rip out those servos? Disconnect them?"

"They're built into the guts of the ship," Agee said. "We'd need a full machine shop and skilled help. Even then, it wouldn't be easy."

Barnett was silent for a long time. Finally he said, "All right."

"All right what?"

"We're licked. We've got to go back to that planet and take our own ship."

AGEE heaved a sigh of relief and punched a new course on the ship's tape.

"You think the alien'll give it back?" Victor asked.

"Sure he will," Barnett said, "if he's not dead. He'll be pretty anxious to get his own ship back. And he has to leave our ship to get in his."

"Sure. But once he gets back in this ship . . ."

"We'll gimmick the controls," Barnett said. "That'll slow him down."

"For a little while," Agee pointed out. "But he'll get into the air sooner or later, with blood in his eye. We'll never outrun him."

"We won't have to," Barnett said. "All we have to do is get into the air first. He's got a strong hull, but I don't think it'll take three atomic bombs."

"I hadn't thought of that," Agee said, smiling faintly.

"Only logical move," Barnett said complacently. "The alloys in the hull will still be worth something. Now, get us back

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without frying us, if you can."

Agee turned the engines on. He swung the ship around in a tight curve, piling on all the Gs they could stand. The servos clicked on, and the temperature shot rapidly up. Once the curve was rounded, Agee pointed *Endeavor II* in the right direction and shut off the engines.

They coasted most of the way. But when they reached the planet, Agee had to leave the engines on, to bring them around the deceleration spiral and into the landing.

They were barely able to get out of the ship. Their skins were blistered and their shoes burned through. There was no time to gimmick the controls.

They retreated to the woods and waited.

"Perhaps he's dead," Agee said hopefully.

They saw a small figure emerge from *Endeavor I*. The alien was moving slowly, but he was moving.

They watched. "Suppose," Victor said, "he's made a weapon of some kind. Suppose he comes after us."

"Suppose you shut up," Barnett said.

The alien walked directly to his own ship. He went inside and shut the locks.

"All right," Barnett said, standing up. "We'd better blast off in a hurry. Agee, you take the controls. I'll connect the piles. Victor, you secure the locks. Let's go!"

They sprinted across the plain and, in a matter of seconds, had reached the open airlock of *Endeavor I*.

EVEN if he had wanted to hurry, Kalen didn't have the necessary strength to pilot his ship. But he knew that he was safe, once inside. No alien was going to walk through those sealed ports.

He found a spare air tank in the rear and opened it. His ship filled with rich, life-giving yellow air. For long minutes, Kalen just breathed it.

Then he lugged three of the biggest kerla nuts he could find to the galley and let the Cracker open them.

After eating, he felt much better. He let the Changer take off his outer hide. The second layer was dead, too, and the Changer cut that off him, but stopped at the third, living layer.

He was almost as good as new when he slipped into the pilot's room.

It was apparent to him now that the aliens had been temporarily insane. There was no other way to explain why they had come back and returned his ship.

Therefore, he would find their

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authorities and report the location of the planet. They could be found and cured, once and for all.

Kalen felt very happy. He had not deviated from the Mabogian ethic, and that was the important thing. He could so easily have left the thetnite bomb in their ship, all set and timed. He could have wrecked their engines. And there *had* been a temptation.

But he had not. He had done nothing at all.

All he had done was construct a few minimum essentials for the preservation of his life.

Kalen activated his controls and found that everything was in perfect working order. The acceleration fluid poured in as he turned on the piles.

VICTOR reached the airlock first and dashed in. Instantly, he was hurled back.

"What happened?" Barnett asked.

"Something hit me," Victor said.

Cautiously, they looked inside.

It was a very neat death trap. Wires from the storage batteries had been hooked in series and rigged across the port. If Victor had been touching the side of the ship, he would have been electrocuted instantly.

They shorted out the system and entered the ship.

It was a mess. Everything movable had been ripped up and strewn around. There was a bent steel bar in a corner. Their high-potency acid had been spilled over the deck and had eaten through in several places. The *Endeavor's* old hull was holed.

"I never thought *he'd* gimmick *us!*" Agee said.

They explored further. Toward the rear was another booby trap. The cargo hold door had been cunningly rigged to the small starter motor. If anyone touched it, the door would be slammed against the wall. A man caught between would be crushed.

There were other hookups that gave no hint of their purpose.

"Can we fix it?" Barnett asked.

Agee shrugged his shoulders. "Most of our tools are still on board *Endeavor II*. I suppose we can get her patched up inside of a year. But even then, I don't know if the hull will hold."

They walked outside. The alien ship blasted off.

"What a monster!" Barnett said, looking at the acid-eaten hull of his ship.

"You can never tell what an alien will do," Agee answered.

"The only good alien is a dead alien," Victor said.

Endeavor I was now as incomprehensible and dangerous as *Endeavor II*.

And *Endeavor II* was gone.

—ROBERT SHECKLEY

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Wainer

By MICHAEL SHAARA

Certainly, life has a meaning —though sometimes it takes a lifetime to learn what it is.

THE man in the purple robe was too old to walk or stand. He was wheeled upon a purple bench into the center of a marvelous room, where unhuman beings whom we shall call "They" had gathered and waited. Because he was such an old man, he commanded a great sum of respect, but he was nervous before Them and spoke with apology, and sometimes with irritation, because he could not understand what They were thinking and it worried him.

Yet there was no one left like this old man. There was no one anywhere who was as old—but that does not matter. Old men are important not for what they

Illustrated by ASHMAN

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have learned, but for whom they have known, and this old man had known Wainer.

Therefore he spoke and told Them what he knew, and more that he did not know he was telling. And They, who were not men, sat in silence and the deepest affection, and listened . . .

WILLIAM Wainer died and was forgotten (said the old man) much more than a thousand years ago. I have heard it said that people are like waves, rising and riding and crumbling, and if a wave fell once on a shore long ago, then it left its mark on on the beach and changed the shape of the world, but is not remembered. That is true, except for the bigger waves. There is nothing remarkable in Wainer's being forgotten then, because he was not a big wave. In his own time, he was nothing at all—he even lived off the state—and the magnificent power that was in him and that he brought to the world was never fully recognized. But the story of his life is probably the greatest story I have ever heard. He was the beginning of You. I only wish I had known.

From his earliest days, as I remember, no one ever looked after Wainer. His father had been one of the last of the priests. Just before young Wainer was born in 2430, the government passed one of the great laws, the we-take-no-barriers-into-space edict, and religious missionaries were banned from the stars. Wainer's father never quite recovered from that. He went down to the end of his days believing that the Earth had gone over to what he called "Anti-Christ." He was a fretful man and he had no time for the boy.

Young Wainer grew up alone. Like everyone else, he was operated on at the age of five, and it turned out that he was a Reject. At the time, no one cared. His mother afterward said that she was glad, because Wainer's head even then was magnificently shaped and it would have been a shame to put a lump on it. Of course, Wainer knew that he could never be a doctor, or a pilot, or a technician of any kind, but he was only five years old and nothing was final to him. Some of the wonderful optimism he was to carry throughout his youth, and which he was to need so badly in later years, was already with him as a boy.

And yet You must understand that the world in which Wainer grew up was a good world, a fine world. Up to that time, it was the best world that ever was, and no one doubted that—

(Some of Them had smiled in Their minds. The old man was embarrassed.)

You must try to understand.

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We all believed in that world; Wainer and I and everyone believed. But I will explain as best I can and doubtless You will understand.

When it was learned, long before Wainer was born, that the electronic brains could be inserted within the human brain and connected with the main neural paths, there was no one who did not think it was the greatest discovery of all time. Do You know, can You have any idea, what the mind of Man must have been like before the brains? God help them, they lived all their lives without controlling themselves, trapped, showered by an unceasing barrage of words, dreams, totally unrelated, uncontrollable memories. It must have been horrible.

THE brains changed all that. They gave Man freedom to think, freedom from confusion: they made him logical. There was no longer any need to memorize, because the brains could absorb any amount of information that was inserted into them, either before or after the operation. And the brains never forgot, and seldom made mistakes, and computed all things with an inhuman precision.

A man with a brain — or "clerks," as they were called, after Le Clerq—knew everything, literally *everything*, that there was to know about his profession. And as new information was learned, it was made available to all men, and punched into the clerks of those who desired it. Man began to think more clearly than ever before, and thought with more knowledge behind him, and it seemed for a while that this was a godlike thing.

But in the beginning, of course, it was very hard on the Rejects.

Once in every thousand persons or so would come someone like Wainer whose brain would not accept the clerk, who would react as if the clerk were no more than a hat. After a hundred years, our scientists still did not know why. Many fine minds were ruined with their memory sections cut away, but then a preliminary test was devised to prove beforehand that the clerks would not work and that there was nothing that anyone could do to make them work. Year by year the Rejects, as they were called, kept coming, until they were a sizable number. The more fortunate men with clerks outnumbered the Rejects a thousand to one, and ruled the society, and were called "Rashes"—slang for Rationals.

Thus the era of the Rash and Reject.

Now, of course, in those days the Rejects could not hope to compete in a technical world. They could neither remember nor

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compute well enough, and the least of all doctors knew more than a Reject ever could, the worst of all chemists knew much more chemistry, and a Reject certainly could never be a space pilot.

As a result of all this, mnemonics was studied as never before; and Rejects were taught memory. When Wainer was fully grown, his mind was more ordered and controlled and his memory more exact than any man who had lived on Earth a hundred years before. But he was still a Reject and there was not much for him to do.

He began to feel it, I think, when he was about fifteen. He had always wanted to go into space, and when he realized at last that it was impossible, that even the meanest of jobs aboard ship was beyond him, he was very deeply depressed. He told me about those days much later, when it was only a Reject's memory of his youth. I have lived a thousand years since then, and I have never stopped regretting that they did not let him go just once when he was young, before those last few days. It would have been such a little thing for them to do.

I FIRST met Wainer when he was eighteen years old and had not yet begun to work. We met in one of those music clubs that used to be in New York City, one of the weird, smoky, crowded little halls where Rejects could gather and breathe their own air away from the — as we called them—"lumpheads." I remember young Wainer very clearly. He was a tremendous man, larger even than You, with huge arms and eyes, and that famous mass of brownish hair. His size set him off from the rest of us, but it never bothered him, and although he was almost painfully awkward, he was never laughed at.

I don't quite know how to describe it, but he was very big—ominous, almost—and he gave off an aura of tremendous strength. He said very little, as I remember; he sat with us silently and drank quite a bit, and listened to the music and to us, grinning from time to time with a wonderfully pleasant smile. He was very likable.

He was drawn to me, I think, because I was a *successful* Reject—I was just then becoming known as a surgeon. I sincerely believed that he envied me.

At any rate, he was always ready to talk to me. In the early days I did what I could to get him working, but he never really tried. He had only the Arts, You see, and they never really appealed to him.

(There was a rustle of surprise

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among Them. The old man nodded.)

It is true. He never wanted to be an artist. He had too much need for action in him, and he did not want to be a lonely man. But because of the Rashes, he had no choice.

The Rashes, as You know, had very little talent. I don't know why. Perhaps it was the precision, the methodicity with which they lived, or perhaps—as we proudly claimed—the Rejects were Rejects because they had talent. But the result was wonderfully just: the Rejects took over the Arts and all other fields requiring talent. I myself had good hands; I became a surgeon. Although I never once operated without a Rash by my side, I was a notably successful surgeon.

It was a truly splendid thing. That is why I say it was a good world. The Rash and Reject combined in society and made it whole. And one thing more was in favor of the Reject: he was less precise, less logical, and therefore more glamorous than the Rash. Hence Rejects always had plenty of women, and Reject women did well with men.

But the Rash, in the end, had everything that really counted.

Well, there was only such work that a Reject could do. But none of it fitted Wainer. He tried all the arts at one time or another before he finally settled on music. In music there was something vast and elemental; he saw that he could build. He began, and learned, but did little actual work. In those beginning years, he could be found almost always out by the Sound, or wandering among the cliffs across the River, his huge hands fisted and groping for something to do, wondering, wondering, why he was a Reject.

THE first thing he wrote was the *Pavanne,* which came after his first real love affair. I cannot remember the girl, but in a thousand years I have not forgotten the music. It may surprise You to learn that the *Pavanne* was a commercial success. It surprised Wainer, too. The Rashes were actually the public, and their taste was logical. Most of all they liked Bach and Mozart, some Beethoven and Greene, but nothing emotional and obscure. The *Pavanne* was a success because it was a love piece, wonderfully warm and gay and open. Wainer never repeated that success.

That was one of the few times I ever saw him with money. He received the regular government fee and a nice sum in royalties, but not quite enough for a trip into space, so he drank it all up. He was happy for a while. He

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went back to the music clubs and stayed away from the beaches, but when I asked him if he was working on anything else, he said no, he had nothing else to write.

Right after that, he fell in love again, this time with his mother.

The longevity treatment was still fairly new; few had stopped to consider that, as men grew older, their mothers remained young, as tender and fresh as girls in school, and there is no woman as close to a man as his mother. Inevitably, a great many men fell in love that way. Wainer was one. His mother, poor girl, never suspected, and it was pure anguish for him. It was some time before he had recovered enough to talk about it, and by then he was thirty. One of the ways he recovered was by writing more music.

There were a lot of lesser works, and then came the First Symphony.

Looking back over the centuries, I cannot understand how the thing was so controversial. The Rashes wrote of it harshly in all their papers. The Rejects almost unanimously agreed that it was a masterpiece. I myself, when I heard it, became aware that Wainer was a great man.

BECAUSE of the controversy which raged for a while, Wainer made some money, but the effect of the criticism was to keep him from writing for years. There is something in that First Symphony of the Wainer of later years, some of the hungry, unfinished, incomprehensible strength. Wainer knew that if he wrote anything else, it would be much like the First, and he recoiled from going through it all again. He went back to the beaches.

He had something rare in those days—a great love for the sea. I suppose it was to him what space is to others. I know that the next thing he wrote was a wild, churning, immortal thing which he called Water Music; and I know that he himself loved it best of anything he wrote, except, of course, the Tenth Symphony. But this time was worse than the last. The only ones who paid any attention to Water Music were the Rejects, and they didn't count.

If Wainer had been a true composer, he would have gone on composing whether anyone cared or not, but as I have said, he was not really an artist. Despite the fact that he was the greatest composer we have ever known, music was only a small thing to him. He had a hint, even then, that although he had been born on Earth there was something in him that was alien, and that there was so much left to do, so much to be seen, and because he could not

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understand what it was that fired him, he ground himself raw, slowly, from within, while walking alone by the rocks on the beaches.

When I saw him again, after I took ship as a surgeon to Altair, he was forty, and he looked—I borrow the phrase—like a man from a land where nobody lived. Having written no music at all, he was living again on government charity. He had a room, of sorts, and food, but whatever money he got he drank right up, and he was such a huge and haggard man that even Rejects left him carefully alone. I did what I could for him, which wasn't much except keep him drunk. It was then that he told me about his feeling for space, and a great many other things, and I remember his words:

"I will have to go out into space some day. It is almost as if I used to live there."

Shortly after that, the coughing began. But it came very seldom and seemed no more than a common thing. Because there was no longer any such thing as disease, neither Wainer nor I thought much about it, except that Wainer went and got some pills from the government. For a long while—we may be thankful for that, at least—the cough did not bother him.

And so the years passed.

WHEN Wainer was forty-two, he met the girl. Her name was Lila. She was a Rash, a teacher of mnemonics, and all I can remember of her are the dark-brown lovely eyes, and the warm, adoring face. She was the only woman that Wainer ever really loved, except perhaps his mother, and he chose to have his child by her.

Because of the population problem, a man could have one child then every hundred years. Wainer had his child by Lila, and although he was very happy that the boy turned out to be a Rash, he never paid him much attention.

He was about fifty then and beginning to break down. So that he could see Lila often and with pride, he wrote a great deal during those years, and his lungs were collapsing all that while. It was out of that period that he wrote all his symphonies from the Second to the Ninth.

It is unbelievable; they were all purely commercial. He tossed them out with a part of his mind. I cannot help but wonder what the rest of that mind was doing.

I can see him now, that gaunt and useless man, his great muscled arms chained to a pen, his stony, stretching legs cramped down beneath a desk . . .

I did not see him again for almost ten years, because he went

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away. He left New York for perhaps the only time in his life, and began to wander across the inland of the American continent. I heard from him rarely. I think it was in one of those letters that he first mentioned the pain that was beginning in his lungs.

I never knew what he did, or how he lived during those ten years. Perhaps he went into the forests and worked and lived like a primitive, and perhaps he just walked. He had no transportation. I know that he was not wholly sane then, and never was again until the end of his life. He was like a magnificent machine which has run out of tune for too many years—the delicate gears were strained and cracking.

(The old man paused in the utter silence, while several tears dropped down his cheek. None of Them moved, and at last he went on.)

Near the end of the ten years, I received a package from him in the mail. In it was a letter and the manuscript to the Storm in Space Overture. He wanted me to register the work and get the government fee, and he asked me the only favor he had ever asked of anyone, that I get him the money, because he was going into space.

He came back some weeks later, on foot. I had gotten the money from Rejects—they had heard the Overture — it was enough. He brought Lila with him and was going to make reservations. He was heading, I think, only as far as Alpha Centauri.

It was too late.

THEY examined him, as someone should have a long time ago, as someone would have if he had only ever asked, but in the end it would have made no difference either way, and it was now that they found out about his lungs.

There was nothing anyone could do. At first I could not believe it. People did not get sick and die. *People just did not die!* Because I was only a Reject and a surgeon, no Rash doctor had ever told me that this had happened before, many times, to other men. I heard it not from the Rashes, but from Wainer.

His lungs were beginning to atrophy. They were actually dying within his body, and no one as yet knew why, or could stop it. He could be kept alive without lungs, yes, for a long while. I asked if we could graft a lung into him and this is what I was told: Because no one had yet synthesized human tissue, the graft would have to be a human lung, and in this age of longevity there were only a few available. Those few, of course, went only

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to important men, and Wainer was nothing.

I volunteered a lung of my own, as did Lila, as did many Rejects. There was hope for a while, but when I looked into Wainer's chest I saw for myself that there was no way to connect. So much was wrong, so much inside him was twisted and strange that I could not understand how he had lived at all. When I learned of the other men who had been like this, I asked what had been done. The answer was that nothing had been done at all.

So Wainer did not go out into space. He returned instead to his single room to sit alone and wait, while the cool world around him progressed and revolved, while the city and its people went on without notice, while a voucher was being prepared somewhere, allowing the birth of another child because citizen Wainer would soon be dead.

What could the man have thought, that huge, useless man? When he sat by his window and watched the world moving by, and looked up at night to the stars, and when he drank cool water, or breathed morning air, or walked or sat or lay down, what was there for him to think?

He had one life, the same as any man, one time to be upon the Earth, and it was ending now as a record of nothing, as a piece of loneliness carved with great pain, as a celestial abortion, withered, wasted. There was nothing in his life, nothing, nothing, which he had ever wanted to be, and now he was dying without reason in a world without reason, unused, empty, collapsing, alone.

He went down to the beach again.

In the days that came, he was a shocking sight. What was happening became known, and when he walked the streets people stared at the wonder, the sickness, the man who was dying. Therefore he went out to the beaches and slept and took no treatments and no one will ever know what was in his mind, his million-faceted mind, as he waited to die.

WELL, it was told to me at last because I knew Wainer, and they needed him. It was told hesitantly, but when I heard it I broke away and ran, and in the clean air of the beach I found Wainer and told him.

At first he did not listen. I repeated it several times. I told him what the Rashes had been able to learn. He stood breathing heavily, face to the Sun, staring out over the incoming sea. Then I knew what he was thinking.

The Rashes had told me this:

The atrophy of the lungs was

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not all that happened, but it was the major thing, and it came only to Rejects. After years of study, it could be stated, cautiously, that the disease seemed to be in the nature of an *evolutionary* change. For many years they had probed for the cause of the Rejects, and the final conclusion—to be kept from the people—was that there was some variation in the brain of the Reject, something subtly, unfathomably different from the brain of a Rash. And so it was also with the lungs, and with other parts of the body. And the scientists thought it was Evolution.

I told this to Wainer, and more, while peace spread slowly across his rugged face. I said that the nature of life was to grow and adapt, and that no one knew why. The first cells grew up in the sea and then learned to live on land, and eventually lifted themselves to the air, and now certainly there was one last step to be taken.

The next phase of change would be into space, and it was clear now what Wainer was, what all the Rejects were.

Wainer was a link, incomplete, groping, unfinished. A link.

It meant more to him, I think, than any man can ever really understand. He had a purpose, after all, but it was more than that. He was a creature with a home. He was part of the Universe more deeply than any of us had ever been. In the vast eternal plan which only You and Your kind can see, Wainer was a beginning, vital part. All the long years were not wasted. The pain of the lungs was dust and air.

Wainer looked at me and I shall never forget his face. He was a man at peace who has lived long enough.

(Because They knew much more than the old man could ever know, They were utterly, nakedly absorbed, and the silence of the room was absolute. The old man tired and closed to the end, while They—unbreathing, undying, telepathic and more, the inconceivable next phase in the Evolution of Man—listened and learned.)

HE lived for another six months, long enough to take part in the experiments the Rashes had planned, and to write the Tenth Symphony. Even the Rashes could not ignore the Tenth.

It was Wainer's valedictory, a sublime, triumphant summation, born of his hope for the future of Man. It was more than music; it was a cathedral in sound. It was Wainer's soul.

Wainer never lived to hear it played, to hear himself become famous, and in the end, I know,

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he did not care. Although we could have saved him for a little while, although I pleaded with him to remain for the sake of his woman and his music, Wainer knew that the pattern of his life was finished, that the ending time was now.

For Wainer went out into space at last, into the sweet dark home between the stars, moving toward the only great moment he would ever have.

The Rashes wanted to see how his lungs would react in alien atmospheres. Not in a laboratory —Wainer refused—but out in the open Sun, out in the strange alien air of the worlds themselves, Wainer was set down. On each of a dozen poisonous worlds he walked. He opened his helmet while we tiny men watched. He breathed.

And he lived.

He lived through methane, through carbon dioxide, through nitrogen and propane. He existed without air at all for an incredible time, living all the while as he never had before, with a wonderful, glowing excitement. And then at last there was that final world which was corrosive. It was too much, and Wainer smiled regretfully, holding himself upright with dignity by the base of an alien rock, and still smiling, never once moving to close his helmet, he died.

THERE was a long pause. The old man was done.

They looked at him with the deep compassion that his own race had denied to those who were different or lesser than themselves.

One of Them arose and gently spoke.

"And now you are the last of your kind, as alone as Wainer was. We are sorry."

There was no bitterness in the old man's voice. "Don't be. Wainer was content to die, knowing that he was the link between us and You. Yet neither he nor You could have been if humanity had never existed. We had our place in the endless flow of history. We were, so to speak, Wainer's parents and Your grandparents. I, too, am content, proud of the children of Man."

—MICHAEL SHAARA

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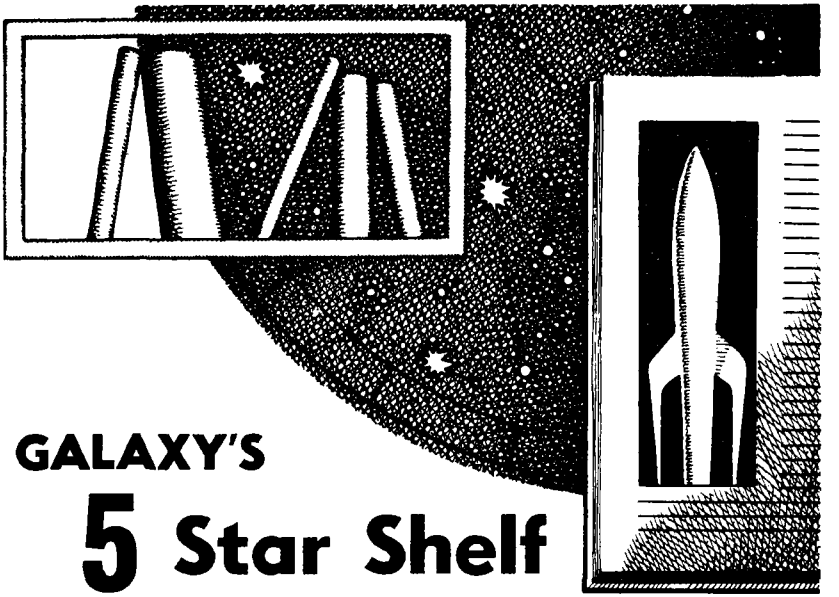

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, 1953. Edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty. Frederick Fell, Inc., New York, 1953. 279 pages, $3.50

THE fifth Bleiler-Dikty annual maintains the same standards as its predecessors, with an extra bonus in the form of a slashing attack by Alfred Bester on the immaturity of much science fiction — an essay that every science fiction reader and writer should read with prayerful attention.

The book contains 15 stories, four of which have already been anthologized elsewhere. There is more fantasy than heretofore, thus reinforcing a trend already noticeable in some magazines. The best items, however, are science fiction—stories by William Temple, Mark Clifton, Walter Miller, Frank Robinson, and two by Eric Frank Russell.

The rest of the items are good reading, too, on the whole, though certain of them do not rate, in my mind, among the 15 best of the year, by any means. Nevertheless, the collection is a good cross-section of the 1952 (NOT 1953) magazine output that was available.

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FLYING SAUCERS FROM OUTER SPACE by Donald E. Keyhoe. Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1953. 276 *pages,* $3.00

AFTER reading this book, I wonder whether certain pundits of modern science haven't got themselves out on a fragile limb by denying the existence of Flying Saucers and the possibility that they may be extraterrestrial in origin.

The amount of evidence that the U.S. Armed Forces released recently, plus the way in which certain competent officials have "reversed the field" and now seem to agree that (*if* the Saucers are real) the only explanation can be that they are of intelligent extraterrestrial origin, certainly gives Keyhoe's theories a certain measure of rationality. His source material is almost ominously persuasive.

Unfortunately, the author weakens his evidence by presenting it as a semi-fictional suspense story, a thoroughly unscientific approach. It is hardly a solid and reasoned study of the evidence—and yet that evidence is unassailably factual.

Despite the author's sensationalism, this book should be read by anyone who wants to know more about the increasing official concern over the Flying Saucer mystery.

E PLURIBUS UNICORN by Theodore Sturgeon. Abelard Press, New York, 1953. 276 *pages,* $2.75

RARELY will you find within the covers of one book such a wide spectrum of fantasies as in this, Sturgeon's second short story collection. And even more rarely will you find such a continuously high level of writing. These thirteen yarns are genuinely distinguished stuff.

Many of the tales will be unfamiliar to readers of "pure" science fiction, since most of them come from the left-hand, or gruesome-weird, drawer of Sturgeon's mind. And every one of them is worth encountering; every one will leave a permanent mark (or should I say cicatrice?) on your memory. In them you will encounter depths of horror and soaring heights of poetic imagination such as few writers of this generation are able to evoke. Don't miss it!

OUT OF THE DEEPS by John Wyndham. Ballantine Books, New York, 1953. $2.00 *cloth,* 35c *paper.*

THE author of that smash hit of 1951, *The Day of the Triffids,* has written what is in all ways a better and a more enthralling book in this, his second

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full-length novel. It is written with a charm, a satirical sharpness, and a sense for character and story line that is reminiscent of Fowler Wright at his best—plus a clarity and economy of language that the author of *Deluge* never could seem to command.

The plot is old, yet very freshly done. Things from space drop into the ocean deeps; no one believes they are real. Time passes and villages on tropic isles begin to be raided by fantastic amphibious tank machines, as the raiders try to take over. That menace eventually is conquered, though only after heavy loss of life throughout the ocean-bordering lands. But then the aliens in the deeps work out a monstrous new method of attack—one I won't tell you about. Suffice to say that, as a result of it, the population of England is reduced to 5,000,000 and civilization is nearly annihilated before a defense is found.

It's all sheer melodrama, sure, but melodrama spiced with wit, with pungent commentary on human foibles, with sharp attacks on human complacency and conceit—a truly satisfying shocker.

THE BEST FROM STARTLING STORIES, edited by Samuel Mines. Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1953. 301 *pages,* $3.50

THIS slim collection of 11 tales (about 32c each!) contains only three really good ones—Sturgeon's "The Wages of Synergy," Bradbury's already well-known "The Naming of Names," and Arthur Clarke's vividly horrible "Thirty Seconds — Thirty Days," previously published in an English anthology under the title "Breaking Strain."

Of the other stories, Edmond Hamilton's "What's It Like Out There?" is powerful but overdone; A. E. van Vogt's "Dormant" is a too-terrific concept that nevertheless chills you; and Sherwood Springer's "No Land of Nod" takes a new and realistic look at the sexual implications of the post-Atomic Adam and Eve idea, but does it much too portentously.

I do not think the rest of the tales deserve reprinting.

STAR MAN'S SON (and) STAR RANGERS by André Norton. Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1952 *and* 1953. *Each* $2.95

A NEW writer of science fiction juveniles is always welcome—particularly when his (or, in this case, her) stories are of high quality. Indeed, these two tales are sufficiently well done to hold the attention of any adult who wants to relax in some high (and

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often a bit bloody) adventures in distant tomorrows.

Star Man's Son tells of a post-Atomic world that has returned to savagery, and how a mutant member of a mountain clan—after innumerable escapes and conflicts—brings the plains tribes together with his program to plant the seeds of a new and non-warlike civilization. It's an almost cruelly vivid story, with a fine ethical viewpoint that raises it several levels above the average.

Star Rangers tells of a crew of the Stellar Patrol in the year 8054, making a forced landing on a seemingly uncivilized planet at the Galaxy's edge. How they fare, their adventures with the passengers and crew of a galactic empire spaceship that had landed earlier, and the final identification of the planet and its place in the galactic scheme all add up to an enthralling story.

Here again, we have a strong plea for racial tolerance and friendship that makes the book more than just a science fantasy thriller.

SPACE, SPACE, SPACE. Edited by William Sloane. Franklin Watts, Inc., New York, 1953. 288 *pages,* $2.50

THERE are only ten stories in this collection, but the combination of high quality superb bookmaking (it reminds one of the old days when books could be handsome at a reasonable price), and a pleasant set of editorial notes all make it stand out among the current anthologies.

Seven of the tales are B or better and three are rather minor — on the whole, an excellent cross-section of space travel and alien invasion stories. Only one has appeared previously in an anthology—Eric Frank Russell's superb "Dear Devil."

This book is one of a series of special-subject anthologies designed primarily for use in high school libraries and similar outlets. It is a distinguished addition to that series.

THE BLACK STAR PASSES by John W. Campbell, Jr. Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa., 1953. 256 *pages,* $3.00

THREE creaking classics from the infancy of modern science fiction are presented in this new book by the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* — novelets that are fun to read, provided you constantly bear in mind that they are rococo antiques and not science fiction as we understand it today. Believable characters, human relations, even logical plots, these stories have none of. Inventions, gimmicks, impossibil-

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ities are there in full flood.

In the first tale alone, called "Piracy Preferred," we have an invisibility machine and a "perfect" solar energy motor, together with some cops-and-robbers chasing through the stratosphere.

"Solarite" and "The Black Star Passes," the other two stories, go on from there into Outer Space, with the same Super-scientists inventing new Super-gadgets and staving off new Super-varieties of Invincible Monsters, though, I assure you, infinitely better than the stuff that was being published (and still is) by men of lesser innate caliber than John Campbell.

All three tales were originally published in 1930, and those of you who are old enough to have read them will probably have a wonderful time bathing in the nostalgia of those simple days of comic-book plots, cardboard characters and Buck Rogers gadgets.

Younger fans may find the mixture more difficult to take, with its hard-breathing style and its incredibilities, but even they may get a bang out of tasting a bit of the original brew from which has mutated much of the best of today's science fantasy.

As Mr. Campbell says in introducing his stories, while they "don't have the finesse of later work, they have a bounding enthusiasm that belongs with a young field, designed for and built by young men."

THE WHITE WIDOWS by Sam Merwin, Jr. Doubleday and Co., New York, 1953. 244 *pages,* $2.95

TRAVELING with Sam Merwin as a science fiction writer is like being on a fantastic roller-coaster. With one book, you're on the crest—fine, wind-blown stuff, all pace and flash and imagination, like *Killer to Come,* reviewed in the February GALAXY. Then, with the next, like this one, you're in the trough.

This one is about an ancient underground conspiracy of women to get rid of (or dominate) men. The conspiracy is coming to a head in our time because of the discovery of methods of creating children by parthogenesis.

There are a Bright Young Hero, several Beautiful Females, a Fantastic Fat Scientist, and a lot about that most fashionable of all modern science fiction doohickeys, "Psi" powers (the "feminists" all seem to have 'em)—and in the end there is a bloody big "boom" as the conspiracy "seems" to be destroyed.

The book reads fast. But no matter how fast you read, you can't escape its implausibility.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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As a cosmic art dealer, Jones knew art, but he did not know what he liked—until he met—

BLACK CHARLIE

By GORDON R. DICKSON

Illustrated by EMSH

YOU ask me, what is art? You expect me to have a logical answer at my fingertips, because I have been a buyer for museums and galleries long enough to acquire a plentiful crop of gray hairs. It's not that simple.

Well, what is art? For forty years I've examined, felt, admired and loved many things fashioned as hopeful vessels for that bright spirit we call art—and I'm unable to answer the question directly. The layman answers easily—beauty. But art is not necessarily beautiful. Sometimes it is ugly. Sometimes it is crude. Sometimes it is incomplete.

I have fallen back, as many men have in the business of making like decisions, on *feel,* for the judgment of art. You know this business of *feel.* Let us say that you pick up something. A piece of statuary—or better, a fragment of stone, etched and colored by some ancient man of prehistoric times. You look at it. At first it is nothing, a half-developed reproduction of some wild animal, not even as good as a grade-school child could accomplish today.

But then, holding it, your imagination suddenly reaches through rock and time, back to the man himself, half-squatted before the stone wall of his cave—and you see there, not the dusty thing you hold in your

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hand—but what the man himself saw in the hour of its creation. You look beyond the physical reproduction to the magnificent accomplishment of his imagination.

This, then, may be called art—no matter what strange guise it appears in—this magic which bridges all gaps between the artist and yourself. To it, no distance, nor any difference is too great. Let me give you an example from my own experience.

SOME years back, when I was touring the newer worlds as a buyer for one of our well-known art institutions, I received a communication from a man named Cary Longan, asking me, if possible, to visit a planet named Elman's World and examine some statuary he had for sale.

Messages rarely came directly to me. They were usually referred to me by the institution I was representing at the time. Since, however, the world in question was close, being of the same solar system as the planet I was then visiting, I spacegraphed my answer that I would come. After cleaning up what remained of my business where I was, I took an interworld ship and, within a couple of days, landed on Elman's World.

It appeared to be a very raw, very new planet indeed. The port we landed at was, I learned, one of the only two suitable for deep-space vessels. And the city surrounding it was scarcely more than a village. Mr. Longan did not meet me at the port, so I took a cab directly to the hotel where I had made a reservation.

That evening, in my rooms, the annunciator rang, then spoke, giving me a name. I opened the door to admit a tall, brown-faced man, with uncut, dark hair and troubled, green-brown eyes.

"Mr. Longan?" I asked.

"Mr. Jones?" he countered. He shifted the unvarnished wooden box he was carrying to his left hand and put out his right to shake mine. I closed the door behind him and led him to a chair.

He put the box down, without opening it, on a small coffee table between us. It was then that I noticed his rough, bush-country clothes, breeches and tunic of drab plastic. Also an embarrassed air about him, like that of a man unused to city dealings. An odd sort of person to be offering art for sale.

"Your spacegram," I told him, "was not very explicit. The institution I represent . . ."

"I've got it here," he said, putting his hand on the box.

I looked at it in astonishment. It was no more than half a meter square by twenty centimeters deep.

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"There?" I said. I looked back at him, with the beginnings of a suspicion forming in my mind. I suppose I should have been more wary when the message had come direct, instead of through Earth. But you know how it is—something of a feather in your cap when you bring in an unexpected item. "Tell me, Mr. Longan," I said, "where does this statuary come from?"

HE looked at me, a little defiantly. "A friend of mine made them," he said.

"A friend?" I repeated—and I must admit I was growing somewhat annoyed. It makes a man feel like a fool to be taken in that way. "May I ask whether this friend of yours has ever sold any of his work before?"

"Well, no . . ." Longan hedged. He was obviously suffering—but so was I, when I thought of my own wasted time.

"I see," I said, getting to my feet. "You've brought me on a very expensive side-trip, merely to show me the work of some amateur. Good-by, Mr. Longan. And please take your box with you when you leave!"

"You've never seen anything like this before!" He was looking up at me with desperation.

"No doubt," I said.

"Look. I'll show you . . ." He fumbled, his fingers nervous on the hasp. "Since you've come all this way, you can at least look."

Because there seemed no way of getting him out of there, short of having the hotel manager eject him forcibly, I sat down with bad grace. "What's your friend's name?" I demanded.

Longan's fingers hesitated on the hasp. "Black Charlie," he replied, not looking up at me.

I stared. "I beg your pardon. Black—Charles Black?"

He looked up quite defiantly, met my eye and shook his head. "Just Black Charlie," he said with sudden calmness. "Just the way it sounds. Black Charlie." He continued unfastening the box.

I watched rather dubiously, as he finally managed to loosen the clumsy, handmade wooden bolt that secured the hasp. He was about to raise the lid, then apparently changed his mind. He turned the box around and pushed it across the coffee table.

The wood was hard and uneven under my fingers. I lifted the lid. There were five small partitions, each containing a rock of fine-grained gray sandstone of different but thoroughly incomprehensible shape.

I stared at them—then looked back at Longan, to see if this weren't some sort of elaborate joke. But the tall man's eyes were severely serious. Slowly, I began

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to take out the stones and line them up on the table.

I STUDIED them one by one, trying to make some sense out of their forms. But there was nothing there, absolutely nothing. One vaguely resembled a regular-sided pyramid. Another gave a foggy impression of a crouching figure. The best that could be said of the rest was that they bore a somewhat disconcerting resemblance to the kind of stones people pick up for paperweights. Yet they all had obviously been worked on. There were noticeable chisel marks on each one. And, in addition, they had been polished as well as such soft, grainy rock could be.

I looked up at Longan. His eyes were tense with waiting. I was completely puzzled about his discovery—or what he felt was a discovery. I tried to be fair about his acceptance of this as art. It was obviously nothing more than loyalty to a friend, a friend no doubt as unaware of what constituted art as himself. I made my tone as kind as I could.

"What did your friend expect me to do with these, Mr. Longan?" I asked gently.

"Aren't you buying things for that museum-place on Earth?" he said.

I nodded. I picked up the piece that resembled a crouching animal figure and turned it over in my fingers. It was an awkward situation. "Mr. Longan," I said. "I have been in this business many years . . ."

"I know," he interrupted. "I read about you in the newsfax when you landed on the next world. That's why I wrote you."

"I see," I said. "Well, I've been in it a long time, as I say and, I think, I can safely boast that I know something about art. If there is art in these carvings your friend has made, I should be able to recognize it. And I do not."

He stared at me, shock in his greenish-brown eyes.

"You're . . ." he said, finally. "You don't mean that. You're sore because I brought you out here this way."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm *not* sore and I *do* mean it. These things are not merely not good—there is nothing of value in them. Nothing! Someone has deluded your friend into thinking that he has talent. You'll be doing him a favor if you tell him the truth."

HE stared at me for a long moment, as if waiting for me to say something to soften the verdict. Then, suddenly, he rose from the chair and crossed the room in three long strides, staring tensely out the window. His

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calloused hands clenched and unclenched spasmodically.

I gave him a little time to wrestle it out with himself. Then I started putting the pieces of stone back into their sections of the box.

"I'm sorry," I told him.

He wheeled about and came back to me, leaning down from his lanky height to look in my face. "Are you?" he said. "*Are* you?"

"Believe me," I said sincerely, "I am." And I was.

"Then will you do something for me?" The words came in a rush. "Will you come and tell Charlie what you've told me? Will *you* break the news to him?"

"I . . ." I meant to protest, to beg off, but with his tortured eyes six inches from mine, the words would not come. "All right," I said.

The breath he had been holding came out in one long sigh. "Thanks," he said. "We'll go out tomorrow. You don't know what this means. Thanks."

I had ample time to regret my decision, both that night and the following morning, when Longan roused me at an early hour, furnished me with a set of bush clothes like his own, including high, impervious boots, and whisked me off in old air-ground combination flyer that was loaded down with all kinds of bush-dweller's equipment. But a promise is a promise—and I reconciled myself to keeping mine.

We flew south along a high chain of mountains until we came to a coastal area and what appeared to be the swamp delta of some monster river. Here, we began to descend—much to my distaste. I have little affection for hot, muggy climates and could not conceive of anyone wanting to live under such conditions.

We set down lightly in a little open stretch of water—and Longan taxied the flyer across to the nearest bank, a tussocky mass of high brown weeds and soft mud. By myself, I would not have trusted the soggy ground to refrain from drawing me down like quicksand—but Longan stepped out onto the bank confidently enough, and I followed. The mud yielded, little pools of water springing up around my boot soles. A hot rank smell of decaying vegetation came to my nose. Under a thin but uniform blanket of cloud, the sky looked white and sick.

"This way," said Longan, and led off to the right.

I followed him along a little trail and into a small, swampy clearing with dome-shaped huts of woven branches, plastered with mud, scattered

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about it. And, for the first time, it struck me that Black Charlie might be something other than an expatriate Earthman—might, indeed, be a native of this planet, though I had heard of no other humanlike race on other worlds before. My head spinning, I followed Longan to the entrance of one of the huts and halted as he whistled.

I don't remember now what I expected to see. Something vaguely humanoid, no doubt. But what came through the entrance in response to Longan's whistle was more like a large otter, with flat, muscular grasping pads on the ends of its four limbs, instead of feet. It was black, with glossy, dampish hair all over it. About four feet in length, I judged, with no visible tail and a long, snaky neck. The creature must have weighed one hundred to, perhaps, one hundred and fifty pounds. The head on its long neck was also long and narrow, like the head of a well-bred collie—covered with the same black hair, with bright, intelligent eyes and a long mouth.

"This is Black Charlie," said Longan.

The creature stared at me and I returned his gaze. Abruptly, I was conscious of the absurdity of the situation. It would have been difficult for any ordinary person to think of this being as a sculptor. To add to this a necessity, an obligation, to convince it that it was *not* a sculptor—mind you, I could not be expected to know a word of its language—was to pile Pelion upon Ossa in a madman's farce. I swung on Longan.

"Look here," I began with quite natural heat, "how do you expect me to tell—"

"He understands you," interrupted Longan.

"Speech?" I said, incredulously, "Real human speech?"

"No," Longan shook his head. "But he understands actions." He turned from me abruptly and plunged into the weeds surrounding the clearing. He returned immediately with two objects that looked like gigantic puffballs, and handed one to me.

"Sit on this," he said, doing so himself. I obeyed.

BLACK Charlie — I could think of nothing else to call him—came closer, and we sat down together. Charlie was half-squatting on ebony haunches. All this time, I had been carrying the wooden box that contained his sculptures and, now that we were seated, his bright eyes swung inquisitively toward it.

"All right," said Longan, "give it to me."

I passed him the box, and it drew Black Charlie's eyes like a magnet. Longan took it under one

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arm and pointed toward the lake with the other—to where we had landed the flyer. Then his arm rose in the air in a slow, impressive circle and pointed northward, from the direction we had come.

Black Charlie whistled suddenly. It was an odd note, like the cry of a loon—a far, sad sound.

Longan struck himself on the chest, holding the box with one hand. Then he struck the box and pointed to me. He looked at Black Charlie, looked back at me—then put the box into my numb hands.

"Look them over and hand them back," he said, his voice tight. Against my will, I looked at Charlie.

His eyes met mine. Strange, liquid, black inhuman eyes, like two tiny pools of pitch. I had to tear my own gaze away.

Torn between my feeling of foolishness and a real sympathy for the waiting creature, I awkwardly opened the box and lifted the stones from their compartments. One by one, I turned them in my hand and put them back. I closed the box and returned it to Longan, shaking my head, not knowing if Charlie would understand that.

For a long moment, Longan merely sat facing me, holding the box. Then, slowly, he turned and set it, still open, in front of Charlie.

CHARLIE did not react at first. His head, on its long neck, dropped over the open compartments as if he was sniffing them. Then, surprisingly, his lips wrinkled back, revealing long, chisel-shaped teeth. Daintily, he reached into the box with these and lifted out the stones, one by one. He held them in his forepads, turning them this way and that, as if searching for the defects of each. Finally, he lifted one—it was the stone that faintly resembled a crouching beast. He lifted it to his mouth—and, with his gleaming teeth, made slight alterations in its surface. Then he brought it to me.

Helplessly I took it in my hands and examined it. The changes he had made in no way altered it toward something recognizable. I was forced to hand it back, with another headshake, and a poignant pause fell between us.

I had been desperately turning over in my mind some way to explain, through the medium of pantomime, the reasons for my refusal. Now, something occurred to me. I turned to Longan.

"Can he get me a piece of unworked stone?" I asked.

Longan turned to Charlie and made motions as if he were

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breaking something off and handing it to me. For a moment, Charlie sat still, as if considering this. Then he went into his hut, returning a moment later with a chunk of rock the size of my hand.

I had a small pocket knife, and the rock was soft. I held the rock out toward Longan and looked from him to it. Using my pocket knife, I whittled a rough, lumpy caricature of Longan, seated on the puffball. When I was finished, I put the two side by side, the hacked piece of stone insignificant on the ground beside the living man.

Black Charlie looked at it. Then he came up to me—and, peering up into my face, cried softly, once. Moving so abruptly that it startled me, he turned smoothly, picked up in his teeth the piece of stone I had carved. Soon he disappeared back into his hut.

Longan stood up stiffly, like a man who has held one position too long. "That's it," he said. "Let's go."

We made our way to the combination and took off once more, headed back toward the city and the spaceship that would carry me away from this irrational world. As the mountains commenced to rise, far beneath us, I stole a glance at Longan, sitting beside me at the controls of the combination. His face was set in an expression of stolid unhappiness.

THE question came from my lips before I had time to debate internally whether it was wise or not to ask it.

"Tell me, Mr. Longan," I said, "has — er — Black Charlie some special claim on your friendship?"

The tall man looked at me with something close to amazement.

"Claim!" he said. Then, after a short pause, during which he seemed to search my features to see if I was joking. "He saved my life."

"Oh," I said. "I see."

"You do, do you?" he countered. "Suppose I told you it was just after I'd finished killing his mate. They mate for life, you know."

"No, I didn't know," I answered feebly.

"I forget people don't know," he said in a subdued voice. I said nothing, hoping that, if I did not disturb him, he would say more. After a while he spoke. "This planet's not much good."

"I noticed," I answered. "I didn't see much in the way of plants and factories. And your sister world—the one I came from—is much more populated and built up."

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"There's not much here," he said. "No minerals to speak of. Climate's bad, except on the plateaus. Soil's not much good." He paused. It seemed to take effort to say what came next. "Used to have a novelty trade in furs, though."

"Furs?" I echoed.

"Off Charlie's people," he went on, fiddling with the combination's controls. "Trappers and hunters used to be after them, at first, before they knew. I was one of them."

"You!" I said.

"Me!" His voice was flat. "I was doing fine, too, until I trapped Charlie's mate. Up till then, I'd been getting them out by themselves. They did a lot of traveling in those swamps. But, this time, I was close to the village. I'd just clubbed her on the head when the whole tribe jumped me." His voice trailed off, then strengthened. "They kept me under guard for a couple of months.

"I learned a lot in that time. I learned they were intelligent. I learned it was Black Charlie who kept them from killing me right off. Seems he took the point of view that I was a reasonable being and, if he could just talk things over with me, we could get together and end the war." Longan laughed, a little bitterly. "They called it a war, Charlie's people did." He stopped talking.

I waited. And when he remained quiet, I prompted him. "What happened?" I asked.

"They let me go, finally," he said. "And I went to bat for them. Clear up to the Commissioner sent from Earth. I got them recognized as people instead of animals. I put an end to the hunting and trapping."

He stopped again. We were still flying through the upper air of Elman's World, the sun breaking through the clouds at last, revealing the ground below like a huge green relief map.

"I see," I said, finally.

Longan looked at me stonily. We flew back to the city.

I left Elman's World the next day, fully believing that I had heard and seen the last of both Longan and Black Charlie. Several years later, at home in New York, I was visited by a member of the government's Foreign Service. He was a slight, dark man, and he didn't beat about the bush.

"You don't know me," he said. I looked at his card—*Antonio Walters*. "I was Deputy Colonial Representative on Elman's World at the time you were there."

I looked up at him, surprised. I had forgotten Elman's World by that time.

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"Were you?" I asked, feeling a little foolish, unable to think of anything better to say. I turned his card over several times, staring at it, as a person will do when at a loss. "What can I do for you, Mr. Walters?"

"We've been requested by the local government on Elman's World to locate you, Mr. Jones," he answered. "Cary Longan is dying—"

"*Dying!*" I said.

"Lung fungus, unfortunately," said Walters. "You catch it in the swamps. He wants to see you before the end—and, since we're very grateful to him out there for the work he's been doing all these years for the natives, a place has been kept for you on a government courier ship leaving for Elman's World right away—if you're willing to go."

"Why, I . . ." I hesitated. In common decency, I could not refuse. "I'll have to notify my employers."

"Of course," he said.

LUCKILY, the arrangements I had to make consisted of a few business calls and packing my bags. I was, as a matter of fact, between trips at the time. As an experienced traveler, I could always get under way with a minimum of fuss. Walters and I drove out to Government Port, in northern New Jersey and, from there on, the authorities took over.

Less than a week later, I stood by Longan's bedside in the hospital of the same city I had visited years before. The man was now nothing more than a barely living skeleton, the hard vitality all but gone from him, hardly able to speak a few words at a time. I bent over to catch the whispered syllables from his wasted lips.

"Black Charlie . . ." he whispered.

"Black Charlie," I repeated. "Yes, what about him?"

"He's done something new," whispered Longan. "That carving of yours started him off, copying things. His tribe don't like it."

"They don't?" I said.

"They," whispered Longon, "don't understand. It's not normal, the way they see it. They're afraid . . ."

"You mean they're superstitious about what he carves?" I asked.

"Something like that. Listen—he's an artist . . ."

I winced internally at the last word, but held my tongue for the sake of the dying man.

". . . an artist. But they'll kill him for it, now that I'm gone. You can save him, though."

"Me?" I said.

"You!" The man's voice was like a wind rustling through dry

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leaves. "If you go out—take this last thing from him—act pleased . . . then they'll be scared to touch him. But hurry. Every day is that much closer . . ."

His strength failed him. He closed his eyes and his straining throat muscles relaxed to a little hiss of air that puffed between his lips. The nurse hurried me from his room.

THE local government helped me. I was surprised, and not a little touched, to see how many people knew Longan. How many of them admired his attempts to pay back the natives by helping them in any way he could. They located Charlie's tribe on a map for me and sent me out with a pilot who knew the country.

We landed on the same patch of slime. I went alone toward the clearing. With the brown weeds still walling it about, the locale showed no natural change, but Black Charlie's hut appeared broken and deserted. I whistled and waited. I called. And, finally, I got down on my hands and knees and crawled inside. But there was nothing there save a pile of loose rock and a mass of dried weeds. Feeling cramped and uncomfortable, for I am not used to such gymnastics, I backed out, to find myself surrounded by a crowd.

It looked as if all the other inhabitants of the village had come out of their huts and congregated before Charlie's. They seemed agitated, milling about, occasionally whistling at each other on that one low, plaintive note which was the only sound I had ever heard Charlie make. Eventually, the excitement seemed to fade, the group fell back and one individual came forward alone. He looked up into my face for a brief moment, then turned and glided swiftly on his pads toward the edge of the clearing.

I followed. There seemed nothing else to do. And, at that time, it did not occur to me to be afraid.

My guide led me deep into the weed patch, then abruptly disappeared. I looked around surprised and undecided, half-inclined to turn about and retrace my steps by the trail of crushed weeds I had left in my floundering advance. Then, a low whistle sounded close by. I went forward and found Charlie.

HE lay on his side in a little circular open area of crushed weeds. He was too weak to do more than raise his head and look at me, for the whole surface of his body was criss-crossed and marked with the slashings of shallow wounds, from which dark blood seeped slowly and stained the reeds in

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which he lay. In Charlie's mouth, I had seen the long, chisel-teeth of his kind, and I knew what had made those wounds. A gust of rage went through me, and I stooped to pick him up in my arms.

He came up easily, for the bones of his kind are cartilaginous, and their flesh is far lighter than our human flesh. Holding him, I turned and made my way back to the clearing.

The others were waiting for me as we came out into the open. I glared at them—and then the rage inside me went out like a blown candle. For there was nothing there to hate. *They* had not hated Charlie. They had merely feared him—and their only crime was ignorance.

They moved back from me, and I carried Charlie to the door of his own hut. There I laid him down. The chest and arms of my jacket were soaked from his dark body fluid, and I saw that his blood was not clotting as our own does.

Clumsily, I took off my shirt and, tearing it into strips, made a poor attempt to bind up the torn flesh. But the blood came through in spite of my first aid. Charlie, lifting his head, with a great effort, from the ground, picked feebly at the bandages with his teeth, so that I gave up and removed them.

I sat down beside him then, feeling sick and helpless. In spite of Longan's care and dying effort, in spite of all the scientific developments of my own human race, I had come too late. Numbly, I sat and looked down at him and wondered why I could not have come one day earlier.

FROM this half-stuper of self-accusation, I was roused by Charlie's attempts to crawl back into his hut. My first reaction was to restrain him. But, from somewhere, he seemed to have dredged up a remnant of his waning strength—and he persisted. Seeing this, I changed my mind and, instead of hindering, helped. He dragged himself through the entrance, his strength visibly waning.

I did not expect to see him emerge. I believed some ancient instinct had called him, that he would die then and there. But, a few moments later, I heard a sound as of stones rattling from within—and, in a few seconds, he began to back out. Halfway through the entrance, his strength finally failed him. He lay still for a minute, then whistled weakly.

I went to him and pulled him out the rest of the way. He turned his head toward me, holding in his mouth what I first took to be a ball of dried mud.

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I took it from him and began to scrape the mud off with my fingernails. Almost immediately, the grain and surface of the sandstone he used for his carvings began to emerge—and my hands started to shake so hard that, for a moment, I had to put the stone down while I got myself under control. For the first time, the true importance to Charlie, of these things he had chewed and bitten into shape, got home to me.

In that moment, I swore that whatever bizarre form this last and greatest work of his might possess, I would make certain that it was accorded a place in some respectable museum as a true work of art. After all, it had been conceived in honesty and executed in the love that took no count of labor, provided the end was achieved.

And then, the rest of the mud came free in my hands. I saw what it was, and I could have cried and laughed at the same time. For, of all the shapes he could have chosen to work in stone, he had picked the one that no critic would have selected as the choice of an artist of his race. For he had chosen no plant or animal, no structure or natural shape out of his environment, to express the hungry longing of his spirit. None of these had he chosen — instead, with painful clumsiness, he had fashioned an image from the soft and grainy rock; a statue of a standing man.

And I knew what man it was.

Charlie lifted his head from the stained ground and looked toward the lake where my flyer waited. I am not an intuitive man—but, for once, I was able to understand the meaning of a look. He wanted me to leave while he was still alive. He wanted to see me go, carrying the thing he had fashioned. I got to my feet, holding it and stumbled off. At the edge of the clearing, I looked back. He still watched. And the rest of his people still hung back from him. I did not think they would bother him now.

And so I came home.

BUT there is one thing more to tell. For a long time, after I returned from Elman's World, I did not look at the crude statuette. I did not want to, for I knew that seeing it would only confirm what I had known from the start, that all the longing and desires in the world cannot create art where there is no talent, no true visualization. But at the end of one year I was cleaning up all the little details of my office. And, because I believe in system and order—and also, because I was ashamed of myself for having put it off so long—I

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took the statuette from a bottom drawer of my desk, unwrapped it and set it on the desk's polished surface.

I was alone in my office at the time, at the end of a day, when the afternoon Sun, striking red through the tall window beside my desk, touched everything between the walls with a clear, amber light. I ran my fingers over the grainy sandstone and held it up to look at it.

And then—for the first time—I saw it, saw through the stone to the image beyond, saw what Black Charlie had seen, with Black Charlie's eyes, when he looked at Longan. I saw men as Black Charlie's kind saw men—and I saw what the worlds of men meant to Black Charlie. And, above all, overriding all, I saw art as Black Charlie saw it, through his bright alien eyes—saw the beauty he had sought at the price of his life, and had half-found.

But, most of all, I saw that this crude statuette was *art*.

One more word. Amid the mud and weeds of the swamp, I had held the carving in my hands and promised myself that this work would one day stand on display. Following that moment of true insight in my office, I did my best to place it with the institution I represented, then with others who knew me as a reputable buyer.

But I could find no takers. No one, although they trusted me individually, was willing to exhibit such a poor-looking piece of work on the strength of a history that I, alone, could vouch for. There are people, close to any institution, who are only too ready to cry, "Hoax!" For several years, I tried without success.

Eventually, I gave up on the true story and sold the statuette, along with a number of other odd pieces, to a dealer of minor reputation, representing it as an object whose history I did not know.

Curiously, the statuette has justified my belief in what is art, by finding a niche for itself. I traced it from the dealer, after a time, and ran it to Earth quite recently. There is a highly respectable art gallery on this planet which has an extensive display of primitive figures of early American Indian origin.

And Black Charlie's statuette is among them. I will not tell which or where it is.

—GORDON R. DICKSON

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Special Delivery

By DAMON KNIGHT

All Len had to hear was the old gag: "We've never lost a father yet." His child was not even born and it was thoroughly unbearable!

LEN and Moira Connington lived in a rented cottage with a small yard, a smaller garden, and too many fir trees. The lawn, which Len seldom had time to mow, was full of weeds, and the garden was overgrown with blackberry brambles. The house itself was clean and smelled better than most city apartments, and Moira kept geraniums in the windows.

However, it was dark on account of the firs. Approaching the door one late spring afternoon, Len tripped on an unno-

Illustrated by ASHMAN

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ticed flagstone and scattered examination papers all the way to the porch.

When he picked himself up, Moira was giggling in the doorway. "That was funny."

"The hell it was," said Len. "I banged my nose." He picked up his Chemistry B papers in a stiff silence. A red drop fell on the last one. "*Damn* it!"

Moira held the screen door for him, looking contrite and faintly surprised. She followed him into the bathroom. "Len, I didn't mean to laugh. Does it hurt much?"

"No," said Len, staring fiercely at his scraped nose in the mirror. It was throbbing like a gong.

"That's good. It was the funniest thing—I mean funny-peculiar," she clarified hastily.

LEN stared at her; the whites of her eyes were showing: "Is there anything the matter with you?" he demanded.

"I don't know," she said on a rising note. "Nothing like that ever happened to me before. I didn't think it was funny at all. I was worried about you, and I didn't know I was going to laugh —" She laughed again, a trifle nervously. "Maybe I'm cracking up."

Moira was a dark-haired young woman with a placid, friendly disposition. Len had met her in his senior year at Columbia, with—looking at it impartially, which Len seldom did—regrettable results. At present, in her seventh month, she was shaped like a rather bosomy kewpie doll.

Emotional upsets, he remembered, *may occur frequently during this period.* He leaned to get past her belly and kissed her forgivingly. "You're probably tired. Go sit down and I'll get you some coffee."

Except that Moira had never had any hysterics till now, or morning sickness, either — she burped instead — and anyhow, was there anything in the literature about fits of giggling?

After supper, he marked seventeen sets of papers desultorily in red pencil, then got up to look for the baby book. There were four dog-eared paperbound volumes with smiling infants' faces on the covers, but the one he wanted wasn't there. He looked behind the bookcase and on the wicker table beside it. "Moira!"

"Hm?"

"Where the devil is the other baby book?"

"I've got it."

Len went and looked over her shoulder. She was staring at a drawing of a fetus lying in a sort of upside-down Yoga position inside a cross-sectioned woman's body.

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"That's what he looks like," she said. "*Mama.*"

The diagram was of a fetus at term.

"What was that about your mother?" Len asked, puzzled.

"Don't be silly," she said abstractedly.

He waited, but she didn't look up or turn the page. After a while, he went back to his work. He watched her.

Eventually she leafed through to the back of the book, read a few pages, and put it down. She lighted a cigarette and immediately put it out again. She fetched up a belch.

"That was a good one," said Len admiringly.

Moira sighed.

Feeling tense, Len picked up his coffee cup and started toward the kitchen. He halted beside Moira's chair. On the side table was her after-dinner cup, still full of coffee . . . black, scummed with oil droplets, stone-cold.

"Didn't you want your coffee?" he asked solicitously.

She looked at the cup. "I did, but—" She paused and shook her head, looking perplexed.

"Well, do you want another cup now?"

"Yes, please. *No.*"

Len, who had begun a step, rocked back on his heels. "Which, damn it?"

Her face got all swollen. "Oh, Len, I'm so mixed up," she said, and began to tremble.

Len felt part of his irritation spilling over into protectiveness. "What you need," he said firmly, "is a drink."

HE climbed a stepladder to get at the top cabinet shelf which cached their liquor when they had any. Small upstate towns and their school boards being what they were, this was one of many necessary financial precautions.

Inspecting the doleful few fingers of whisky in the bottle, Len swore under his breath. They couldn't afford a decent supply of booze or new clothes for Moira. The original idea had been for Len to teach for a year while they saved enough money so that he could go back for his master's degree. More lately, this proving unlikely, they had merely been trying to put aside enough for summer school, and even that was beginning to look like the wildest optimism.

High-school teachers without seniority weren't supposed to be married.

Or graduate physics students, for that matter.

He mixed two stiff highballs and carried them back into the living room. "Here you are. Skoal."

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"Ah," she said appreciatively. "That tastes—*Ugh.*" She set the glass down and stared at it with her mouth half open.

"What's the matter now?"

She turned her head carefully, as if she were afraid it would come off. "Len, I don't know. *Mama.*"

"That's the second time you've said that. What is this all—"

"Said what?"

"Mama. Look, kid, if you're—"

"I didn't." She appeared a little feverish.

"Sure you did," said Len reasonably. "Once when you were looking at the baby book, and then again just now, after you said ugh to the highball. Speaking of which—"

"*Mama drink milk,*" said Moira, speaking with exaggerated clarity.

Moira hated milk.

Len swallowed half his highball, turned and went silently into the kitchen.

When he came back with the milk, Moira looked at it as if it contained a snake. "Len, I didn't say that."

"Okay."

"I didn't. I didn't say mama and I didn't say that about the milk." Her voice quavered. "And I didn't laugh at you when you fell down."

Len tried to be patient. "It was somebody else."

"It *was.*" She looked down at her gingham-covered bulge. "You won't believe me. Put your hand there. No, a little lower."

Under the cloth, her flesh was warm and solid against his palm. "Kicks?" he inquired.

"Not yet. Now," she said in a strained voice, "you in there—if you want your milk, kick three times."

Len opened his mouth and shut it again. Under his hand there were three explicit kicks, one after the other.

Moira closed her eyes, held her breath and drank the milk down in one long horrid gulp.

"ONCE in a great while," Moira read, "cell cleavage will not have followed the orderly pattern that produces a normal baby. In these rare cases some parts of the body will develop excessively, while others do not develop at all. This disorderly cell growth, which is strikingly similar to the wild cell growth that we know as cancer—" Her shoulders moved convulsively in a shudder. "*Bluh!*"

"Why do you keep reading that stuff, if it makes you feel that way?"

"I have to," she said absently. She picked up another book from the stack. "There's a page missing."

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Len attacked the last of his medium-boiled egg in a noncommittal manner. "It's a wonder it's held together this long," he said, which was perfectly just.

The book had had something spilled on it, partially dissolving the glue, and was in an advanced state of anarchy. However, the fact was that Len had torn out the page in question four nights ago, after reading it carefully. The topic was "Psychoses in Pregnancy."

Moira had now decided that the baby was male, that his name was Leonardo (not referring to Len, but to da Vinci), that he had informed her of these things along with a good many others, that he was keeping her from her favorite foods and making her eat things she detested, like liver and tripe, and that she had to read books of his choice all day long in order to keep him from kicking.

It was miserably hot. With Commencement only two weeks away, Len's students were torpid and galvanic by turns. Then there was the matter of his contract for next year, and the possible opening at Oster High which would mean more money, and the Parent-Teachers thing tonight at which Superintendent Greer and his wife would be regally present.

Moira was knee-deep in Volume I of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes,* moving her lips; an occasional guttural escaped her.

Len cleared his throat. "Moy?"

"*—und also des tragischen*—what in God's name does he mean by that—? What, Len?"

He made an irritated noise. "Why not try the English edition?"

"Leo wants to learn German. What were you going to say?"

Len closed his eyes for a moment. "About this PTA business—you sure you want to go?"

"Well, of course. It's pretty important, isn't it? Unless you think I look too sloppy—"

"No. No, damn it! But are you feeling up to it?"

There were faint violet crescents under Moira's eyes; she had been sleeping badly. "Sure," she said.

"All right. And you'll go see the doctor tomorrow?"

"I said I would."

"And you won't say anything about Leo to Mrs. Greer or anybody?"

SHE looked slightly embarrassed. "Not till he's born, I think, don't you? It would be an awful hard thing to prove—even you wouldn't have believed me if you hadn't felt him kick."

This experiment had not been repeated, though Len had asked often enough. All little Leo had

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wanted, Moira said, was to establish communication with his mother—he didn't seem to be interested in Len at all. "Too young," she explained.

And still—Len recalled the frogs his biology class had dissected last semester. One of them had had two hearts. *This disorderly cell growth . . . like a cancer.* Unpredictable: extra fingers or toes or a double dose of cortex?

"And I'll burp like a lady, if at all," Moira assured him cheerfully as they got ready to leave.

THE room was empty, except for the ladies of the Committee, two nervously smiling male teachers and the impressive bulk of Superintendent Greer when the Conningtons arrived. Card-table legs skreeked on the bare floor; the air was heavy with wood polish and musk.

Greer advanced, beaming fixedly. "Well, isn't this nice? How are you young folks this warm evening?"

"Oh, we thought we'd be earlier, Mr. Greer," said Moira with pretty vexation. She looked surprisingly schoolgirlish and chic; the lump that was Leo was hardly noticeable unless you caught her in profile. "I'll go right now and help the ladies. There must be something I can still do."

"No, now, we won't hear of it. But I'll tell you what you can do—you can go right over there and say hello to Mrs. Greer. I know she's dying to sit down and have a good chat with you. Go ahead now, don't worry about this husband of yours; I'll take care of him."

Moira receded into a scattering of small shrieks of pleasure, at least half of them arcing across a gap of mutual dislike.

Greer, exhibiting perfect dentures, exhaled Listerine. His pink skin looked not only scrubbed but disinfected; his gold-rimmed glasses belonged in an optometrist's window, and his tropical suit had obviously come straight from the cleaner's. It was impossible to think of Greer unshaven, Greer smoking a cigar, Greer with a smudge of axle grease on his forehead, or Greer making love to his wife.

"Well, sir, this weather—"

"When I think of what this valley was like twenty years ago—"

"At today's prices—"

Len listened with growing admiration, putting in comments where required. He had never realized before that there were so many absolutely neutral topics of conversation.

A few more people straggled in, raising the room temperature about half a degree per capita. Greer did not perspire; he merely glowed.

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ACROSS the room, Moira was now seated chummily with Mrs. Greer, a large-bosomed woman in an outrageously unfashionable hat. Moira appeared to be telling a joke; Len knew perfectly well that it was a clean one, but he listened tensely, all the same, until he heard Mrs. Greer yelp with laughter. Her voice carried well: "Oh, that's *priceless!* Oh, dear, I *only* hope I can remember it!"

Len had resolutely not been thinking of ways to turn the conversation toward the Oster vacancy. He stiffened again when he realized that Greer had abruptly begun to talk shop. His heart began pounding absurdly; Greer was asking highly pertinent questions in a good-humored but businesslike way—drawing Len out, and not even bothering to be the slightest bit Machiavellian about it.

Len answered candidly, except when he was certain that he knew what the Superintendent wanted to hear; then he lied like a Trojan.

Mrs. Greer had conjured up a premature pot of tea and, oblivious of the stares of the thirsty teachers present, she and Moira were hogging it, heads together, as if they were plotting the overthrow of the Republic or exchanging recipes.

Greer listened attentively to Len's final reply, which was delivered with as pious an air as if Len had been a Boy Scout swearing on the Manual. But since the question had been "Do you plan to make teaching your career?" there was not a word of truth in it.

He then inspected his paunch and assumed a mild theatrical frown. Len, with that social sixth sense which is unmistakable when it operates, knew that his next words were going to be: "You may have heard that Oster High will be needing a new science teacher next fall . . ."

At this point Moira made a noise like a seal.

The ensuing silence was broken a moment later by a hearty scream, followed instantly by a clatter and a bone-shaking thud.

Mrs. Greer was sitting on the floor, legs sprawled, hat over her eye. She appeared to be attempting to perform some sort of excessively pagan dance.

"IT was Leo," Moira incoherently told Len at home. "You know she's English—she said of course a cup of tea wouldn't hurt me, and she insisted I go ahead and drink it while it was hot, and I couldn't—"

"No, no—wait," said Len in a controlled fury. "What—"

"So I *drank* some. And Leo

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kicked up and made me burp the burp I was saving. And—"

"Oh, Lord!"

"—then he kicked the teacup out of my hand into her lap, and I wish I was *dead!*"

On the following day, Len took Moira to the doctor's office, where they read dog-eared copies of *The Rotarian* and *Field and Stream* for an hour.

Dr. Berry was a round little man with soulful eyes and a twenty-four-hour bedside manner. On the walls of his office, where it is customary for doctors to hang all sorts of diplomas and certificates of membership, Berry had only three. The rest of the space was filled with enlarged colored photographs of beautiful, beautiful children.

When Len followed Moira determinedly into the consulting room, Berry looked mildly shocked for a moment, then apparently decided to carry on as if nothing outré had happened. You could not say that he spoke, or even whispered; he rustled.

"Now, Mrs. Connington, we're looking just fine today. How have we been feeling?"

"Just fine. My husband thinks I'm insane."

"That's g— Well, that's a funny thing for him to think, isn't it?" Berry glanced at the wall midway between himself and Len, then shuffled some file cards

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rather nervously. "Now. Have we had any soreness in our stomach?"

"Yes. He's been kicking me black and blue."

Berry misinterpreted Moira's brooding glance at Len, and his eyebrows twitched involuntarily.

"The baby," said Len. "The *baby* kicks her."

Berry coughed. "Any headaches? Dizziness? Vomiting? Swelling in our legs or ankles?"

"No."

"All rightie. Now let's just find out how much we've gained, and then we'll get up on the examination table."

Berry drew the sheet down over Moira's abdomen as if it were an exceptionally fragile egg. He probed delicately with his fat fingertips, then used the stethoscope.

"Those X-rays," said Len. "Have they come back yet?"

"Mm-hm," said Berry. "Yes, they have." He moved the stethoscope and listened again.

"Did they show anything unusual?" Len asked.

BERRY'S eyebrows twitched a polite question.

"We've been having a little argument," Moira said in a strained voice, "about whether this is an ordinary baby or not."

Berry took the stethoscope tubes away from his ears. He gazed at Moira like an anxious spaniel.

"Now let's not worry about *that*. We're going to have a perfectly healthy wonderful baby, and if anybody tells us differently, why, we'll just tell them to go jump in the lake, won't we?"

"The baby is absolutely normal?" Len said in a marked manner.

"Absolutely." Berry applied the stethoscope again. His face blanched.

"What's the matter?" Len asked after a moment.

The doctor's gaze was fixed and glassy.

"Vagitus uterinus," Berry muttered. He pulled the stethoscope off abruptly and stared at it. "No. of course it couldn't be. Now isn't that a nuisance? We seem to be picking up a radio broadcast with our little stethoscope here. I'll just go and get another instrument."

Moira and Len exchanged glances. Moira's was almost excessively bland.

Berry confidently came in with a new stethoscope, put the diaphragm against Moira's belly, listened for an instant and twitched once all over, as if his mainspring had snapped. Visibly jangling, he stepped away from the table. His jaw worked several times before any sound came out.

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"Excuse me," he said, and walked out in an uneven line.

Len snatched up the instrument he had dropped.

Like a bell ringing under water, muffled but clear, a tiny voice was shouting: *"You bladder-headed pillpusher! You bedside vacuum! You fifth-rate tree surgeon! You inflated—"* A pause. *"Is that you, Connington? Get off the line; I haven't finished with Dr. Bedpan yet."*

Moira smiled, like a Buddha-shaped bomb.

"Well?" she said.

"WE'VE got to think," Len kept saying over and over.

"*You've* got to think." Moira was combing her hair, snapping the comb smartly at the end of each stroke. "I've had plenty of time to think, ever since it happened. When you catch up—"

Len flung his tie at the carved wooden pineapple on the corner of the footboard. "Moy, be *reasonable*. The chances against the kid kicking three times in any one-minute period are only about one in a hundred. The chances against anything like—"

Moira grunted and stiffened for a moment. Then she cocked her head to one side with a listening expression . . . a new mannerism of hers that was beginning to send intangible snakes crawling up Len's spine.

"What now?" he asked sharply.

"He says to keep our voices down. He's thinking."

Len's fingers clenched convulsively, and a button flew off his shirt. Shaking, he pulled his arms out of the sleeves and dropped the shirt on the floor. "Look. I just want to get this straight. When he talks to you, you don't hear him shouting all the way up past your liver and lights. What—"

"You know perfectly well he reads my mind."

"That isn't the same as—" Len took a deep breath. "Let's not get off on that. What I want to know is, what is it like? Do you seem to hear a real voice, or do you just know what he's telling you, without knowing how you know?"

Moira put the comb down in order to think better. "It isn't like hearing a voice. You'd never confuse one with the other. It's more—the nearest I can come to it, it's like remembering a voice. Except that you don't know what's coming."

Len picked his tie off the floor and abstractedly began knotting it on his bare chest. "And he sees what you see, he knows what you're thinking, he can hear when people talk to you?"

"Of course."

"This is tremendous!" Len began to blunder around the bed-

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room, not looking where he was going. "They thought Macaulay was a genius. This kid isn't even *born*. I *heard* him. He was cussing Berry out like Monty Woolley."

"He had me reading *The Man Who Came to Dinner* two days ago."

Len made his way around a small bedside table by trial and error. "That's another thing. How much could you say about his—his personality? I mean does he seem to know what he's doing, or is he just striking out wildly in all directions?" He paused. "Are you sure he's really conscious at all?"

MOIRA began, "That's a silly —" and stopped. "Define consciousness," she said doubtfully.

"All right, what I really mean —*why* am I wearing this necktie?" He ripped it off and threw it over a lampshade. "What I mean—"

"Are you sure you're really conscious?"

"Okay. You make joke, I laugh, ha-ha. What I'm trying to ask is, have you seen any evidence of creative thought, organized thought, or is he just —integrating, along the lines of —of instinctive responses? Do you—"

"I know what you mean. Shut up a minute. . . I don't know."

"I mean is he awake, or asleep and dreaming about us, like the Red King?"

"I don't *know!*"

"And if that's it, what'll happen when he wakes up?"

Moira took off her robe, folded it neatly, and maneuvered herself between the sheets. "Come to bed."

Len got one sock off before another thought struck him. "He reads your mind. Can he read other people's?" He looked appalled. "Can he read mine?"

"He doesn't. Whether it's because he can't, I don't know. I think he just doesn't care."

Len pulled the other sock halfway down and left it there. In a stiffer tone, he said, "One of the things he doesn't care about is whether I have a job."

"No. He thought it was funny. I wanted to sink through the floor, but I had all I could do to keep from laughing when she fell down . . . Len, what are we going to do?"

He swiveled around and looked at her.

"Look," he said, "I didn't mean to sound that gloomy. We'll do something. We'll fix it. Really."

"I hope so."

Careful of his elbows and knees, Len climbed into the bed beside her. "Okay now?"

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"Mm . . .Ugh." Moira tried to sit up suddenly, and almost made it. She wound up propped on one elbow, and said indignantly, "Oh, no!"

Len stared at her in the dimness. "What—?"

She grunted again. "Len, get up. All *right*. Len, *hurry!*"

Len fought his way convulsively past a treacherous sheet and staggered up, goose-pimpled and tense. "What's wrong?"

"You'll have to sleep on the couch. The sheets are in the bottom—"

"On that couch? Are you crazy?"

"I can't help it," she said in a small faint voice. "Please don't let's argue. You'll just have to."

"*Why?*"

"We can't sleep in the same bed," she wailed. "He says it's—oh!—unhygienic!"

LEN'S contract was not renewed. He got a job waiting on tables in a resort hotel, an occupation which pays more money than teaching future citizens the rudiments of three basic sciences, but for which Len had no aptitude. He lasted three days at it; he was then idle for a week and a half until his four years of college physics earned him employment as a clerk in an electrical shop. His employer was a cheerfully aggressive man who assured Len that there were great opportunities in radio and television, and firmly believed that atom-bomb tests were causing all the bad weather.

Moira, in her eighth month, walked to the county library every day and trundled a load of books home in the perambulator. Little Leo, it appeared, was working his way simultaneously through biology, astrophysics, phrenology, chemical engineering, architecture, Christian Science, psychosomatic medicine, marine law, business management, Yoga, crystallography, metaphysics and modern literature.

His domination of Moira's life remained absolute, and his experiments with her regimen continued. One week, she ate nothing but nuts and fruit, washed down with distilled water; the next, she was on a diet of porterhouse steak, dandelion greens and Hadacol.

With the coming of full summer, fortunately, few of the high school staff were in evidence. Len met Dr. Berry once on the street. Berry started, twitched, and walked off rapidly in an entirely new direction.

The diabolical event was due on or about July 29th. Len crossed off each day on their wall calendar with an emphatic black grease pencil. It would, he supposed, be an uncomfortable thing

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at best to be the parent of a super-prodigy. Leo would no doubt be dictator of the world by the time he was fifteen, unless he would be assassinated first, but almost anything would be a fair price for getting Leo out of his maternal fortress.

Then there was the day when Len came home to find Moira weeping over the typewriter, with a half-inch stack of manuscript beside her.

"It isn't anything. I'm just tired. He started this after lunch. Look."

Len turned the face-down sheaf the right way up.

Droning. Abrasing
the demiurge.
Hier begrimms the tale:
Eyes undotted, grewling
and looking, turns off
a larm, seizes cloes.
Stewed Bierly a wretch
Pence, therefore tchews we. Pons!
Let the pants take air of them-
sulves.

THE first three sheets were all like that. The fourth was a perfectly good Petrarchian sonnet reviling the current administration and the political party of which Len was a registration-day member.

The fifth was hand-lettered in the Cyrillic alphabet and illustrated with geometric diagrams. Len put it down and stared shakily at Moira.

"No, go on," she said, "read the rest."

The sixth and seventh were obscene limericks; and the eighth, ninth and so on to the end of the stack were what looked like the first chapters of a rattling good historical adventure novel.

Its chief characters were Cyrus the Great, his jaunty-bosomed daughter Lygea, of whom Len had never previously heard, and a one-armed Graeco-Mede adventurer named Xanthes. There were also courtesans, spies, apparitions, scullery slaves, oracles, cutthroats, lepers, priests and men-at-arms in magnificent profusion.

"He's decided," said Moira, "what he wants to be when he's born."

Leo refused to bothered with mundane details. When there were eighty pages of the manuscript, it was Moira who invented a title and by-line for it—*The Virgin of Persepolis* by Leon Lenn—and mailed it off to a literary agent in New York. His response, a week later, was cautiously enthusiastic. He asked for an outline of the remainder of the novel.

Moira replied that this was impossible, trying to sound as unworldly and impenetrably artistic as she could. She enclosed the thirty-odd pages Leo had turned

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out through her in the meantime.

Nothing was heard from the agent for two weeks. At the end of this time, Moira received an astonishing document, exquisitely printed and bound in imitation leather, thirty-two pages including the index, containing three times as many clauses as a lease.

This turned out to be a book contract. With it came the agent's check for nine hundred dollars.

LEN tilted his mop-handle against the wall and straightened carefully, conscious of every individual gritty muscle in his back. How did women do housework every day, seven days a week, fifty-two goddam weeks a year?

It was a little cooler now that the Sun was down, and he was working stripped to shorts and bath slippers; but he might as well have been wearing an overcoat in a Turkish bath.

The faint whisper of Moira's monstrous new electrical typewriter stopped, leaving a fainter hum. Len went into the living room and sagged on the arm of a chair. Moira, gleaming sweatily in a flowered housecoat, was lighting a cigarette.

"How's it going?" he asked, hoping for an answer. He hadn't always received one.

She switched off the machine wearily. "Page two-eighty-nine. Xanthes killed Anaxander."

"Thought he would. How about Ganesh and Zeuxias?"

"I don't know." She frowned. "I can't figure it out. You know who it was that raped Marianne in the garden?"

"No, who?"

"Ganesh."

"You're kidding!"

"Nope." She pointed to the stack of typescript. "See for yourself."

Len didn't move. "But Ganesh was in Lydia, buying back the sapphire. He didn't return till—"

"I know, I know. But he *wasn't*. That was Zeuxias in a putty nose with his beard dyed. It's all perfectly logical, the way Leo explains it. Zeuxias overheard Ganesh talking to the three Mongols—you remember, Ganesh thought there was somebody behind the curtain, only that was when they heard Lygea scream, and while their backs were turned—"

"All right. But for God's sake, this fouls everything up. If Ganesh never went to Lydia, then he *couldn't* have had anything to do distempering Cyrus's armor. And Zeuxias couldn't, either, because—"

"It's exasperating. I know he's going to pull another rabbit out of the hat and clear everything up, but I don't see how."

Len brooded. "It beats me. It

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had to be either Ganesh or Zeuxias. Or Philomenes, though that doesn't seem possible. Look, damn it, if Zeuxias knew about the sapphire all the time, that rules out Philomenes once and for all. Unless—no. I forgot about that business in the temple. Umm. Do you think Leo really knows what he's doing?"

"I'm certain. Lately I've been able to tell what he's thinking even when he isn't talking to me. I mean just generally, like when he's puzzling over something, or when he's feeling mean. It's going to be something brilliant and he knows what it is, but he won't tell me. We'll just have to wait."

"I guess so." Len stood up, grunting. "You want me to see if there's anything in the pot?"

"Please."

Len wandered into the kitchen, turned the flame on under the silex, stared briefly at the dishes waiting in the sink, and wandered out again. Since the onslaught of The Novel, Leo had relinquished his interest in Moira's diet, and she had been living on coffee. Small blessings . . .

MOIRA was leaning back with her eyes closed, looking very tired. "How's the money?" she asked without moving.

"Lousy. We're down to twenty-one bucks."

She raised her head and opened her eyes wide. "We couldn't be! Len, how could anybody go through nine hundred dollars that fast?"

"Typewriter. And the dictaphone that Leo thought he wanted, till about half an hour after it was paid for. We spent less than fifty on ourselves, I think. Rent. Groceries. It goes, when there isn't any coming in."

She sighed. "I thought it would last longer."

"So did I. If he doesn't finish this thing in a few days, I'll have to go look for work again."

"Oh. That isn't so good. How am I going to take care of the house and do Leo's writing for him?"

"I know, but—"

"All right. If it works out, fine. If it doesn't—he must be near the end by now." She stubbed out her cigarette abruptly and sat up, hands over the keyboard. "He's getting ready again. See about that coffee, will you? I'm half dead."

Len poured two cups and carried them in. Moira was still sitting poised in front of the typewriter, with a curious half-formed expression on her face.

Abruptly the carriage whipped over, muttered to itself briefly and thumped the paper up twice. Then it stopped. Moira's eyes got bigger and rounder.

"What's the matter?" said Len.

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He looked over her shoulder.

The last line on the page read:

TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT

Moira's hands curled into small helpless fists. After a moment, she turned off the machine.

"What?" said Len incredulously. "To be continued—what kind of talk is that?"

"He says he's bored with the novel," Moira replied dully. "He says he knows the ending, so it's artistically complete; it doesn't matter whether anybody else thinks so or not." She paused. "But he says that isn't the real reason."

"Well?"

"He's got two reasons. One is that he doesn't want to finish the book till he's certain he'll have complete control of the money it earns."

"Yes," said Len, swallowing a lump of anger, "that makes a certain amount of sense. It's his book. If he wants guarantees. . ."

"You haven't heard the other one."

"All right, let's have it."

"He wants to teach us—so we'll never forget—who the boss is in this family."

"LEN, I'm awfully tired," Moira complained piteously, late that night.

"Let's just go over it once more. There has to be some way. He still isn't talking to you?"

"I haven't felt anything from him for the last twenty minutes. I think he's asleep."

"All right, let's suppose he *isn't* going to listen to reason—"

"I think we'd better."

Len made an incoherent noise. "Well, okay. I still don't see why we can't write the last chapter ourselves. It'd only be a few pages."

"Go ahead and try."

"Not me. You've done a little writing. Damned good, too. And if you're so sure all the clues are there—Look, if you say you can't do it, all right, we'll hire somebody. A professional writer. It happens all the time. Thorne Smith's last novel—"

"It wasn't Thorne Smith's and it wasn't a novel," she said dogmatically.

"But it sold. What one writer starts, another can finish."

"Nobody ever finished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood.*"

"Oh, hell."

"Len, it's impossible. It is! Let me finish—if you're thinking we could have somebody rewrite the last part Leo did—"

"Yeah, I just thought of that."

"—even that wouldn't do any good. You'd have to go all the way back, almost to page one. It would be another story when you got through. Let's go to bed."

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"Moy, do you remember when we used to worry about the law of opposites?"

"Mm?"

"The law of *opposites*. When we used to be afraid the kid would turn out to be a pick-and-shovel man with a pointy head."

"Uh. Mm."

He turned. Moira was standing with one hand on her belly and the other behind her back. She looked as if she were about to start practicing a low bow and doubted she could make it.

"What's the matter now?" he asked.

"Pain in the small of my back."

"Bad one?"

"No . . ."

"Belly hurt, too?"

She frowned. "Don't be foolish. I'm feeling for the contraction. There it comes."

"The—but you just said the small of your back."

"Where do you think labor pains usually start?"

THE pains were coming at twenty-minute intervals and the taxi had not arrived. Moira was packed and ready. Len was trying to set her a good example by remaining calm. He strolled over to the wall calendar, gazed at it in an offhand manner, and turned away.

"Len, I know it's only the fifteenth of July," she said impatiently.

"Huh? I didn't say anything about that."

"You said it seven times. Sit down. You're making me nervous."

Len perched on the corner of the table, folded his arms, and immediately got up to look out the window. On the way back, he circled the table in an aimless way, picked up a bottle of ink and shook it to see if the cap was on tight, stumbled over a wastebasket, carefully up-ended it, and sat down with an air of *Ici je suis, ici je reste.*

"Nothing to worry about," he said firmly. "Women have kids all the time."

"True."

"What for?" he demanded violently.

Moira grinned at him, then winced slightly and looked at the clock. "Eighteen minutes this time. They're getting closer."

When she relaxed, Len put a cigarette in his mouth and lighted it in only two tries. "How's Leo taking it?"

"Isn't saying. He feels—" she concentrated—"apprehensive. He tells me he's feeling strange and he doesn't like it. I don't think he's entirely awake. Funny—"

"I'm glad this is happening now," Len announced.

"So am I, but—"

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"Look," said Len, moving energetically to the arm of her chair. "We've always had it pretty good, haven't we? Not that it hasn't been tough at times, but—you know."

"I know."

"Well, that's the way it'll be again, once this is over. I don't care how much of a superbrain he is, once he's born—you know what I mean? The only reason he's had the edge on us all this time is he could get at us and we couldn't get at him. If he's got the mind of an adult, he can learn to act like one. It's that simple."

Moira hesitated. "You can't take him out to the woodshed. He's going to be a helpless baby, physically, like anybody else's. He has to be taken care of."

"All right, there are plenty of other ways. If he behaves, he gets read to. Things like that."

"That's right, but there's one other thing I thought of. You remember when you said suppose he's asleep and dreaming, and what happens if he wakes up?"

"Yeah."

"That reminded me of something else, or maybe it's the same thing. Did you know that a fetus in the womb only gets about half the amount of oxygen in his blood that he'll have when he starts to breathe?"

Len looked thoughtful. "I forgot. Well, that's just one more thing Leo does that babies aren't supposed to do."

"Use as much energy as he does, you mean. What I'm getting at is, it can't be because he's getting more than the normal amount of oxygen, can it? I mean he's the prodigy, not me. He must be using it more efficiently. And if that's it, what will happen when he gets twice as much?"

THEY had prepared and disinfected her, along with other indignities, and now she could see herself in the reflector of the big delivery-table light—the image clear and bright, like everything else, but very haloed and swimmy, and looking like a bad statue of Sita. She had no idea how long she had been here—that was the dope, probably—but she was getting pretty tired.

"Bear down," said the staff doctor kindly, and before she could answer, the pain came up like violins and she had to gulp at the tingly coldness of laughing gas.

When the mask lifted, she said, "I *am* bearing down," but the doctor had gone back to work and wasn't listening.

Anyhow, she had Leo. *How are you feeling?*

His answer was muddled—because of the anesthetic?—but she didn't really need it. Her percep-

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tion of him was clear: darkness and pressure, impatience, a slow Satanic anger . . . and something else. Uncertainty? Dread?

"Two or three more ought to do it. Bear down."

Fear. Unmistakable now. And a desperate determination—

"Doctor, he doesn't want to be born!"

"Seems that way sometimes, doesn't it? Now bear down good and hard."

Tell him stop blurrrr too dangerrrr stop I feel worrrr stop I tellrrrr stop

"What, Leo? What?"

"Bear down," the doctor said abstractedly.

Faintly, like a voice under water, gasping before it drowns: *Hurry I hate you tell him sealed incubator tenth oxygen nine-tenths inert gases hurry hurry hurry*

"An incubator!" she panted. "He'll need an incubator . . . to live . . . won't he?"

"Not this baby. A fine, normal, healthy one."

He's idiot lying stupid fool need incubator tenth oxygen tenth tenth hurry before it's

The pressure abruptly ceased.

Leo was born.

The doctor was holding him up by the heels, red, wrinkled, puny. But the voice was still there, very small, very far away: *Too late same as death*

Then a hint of the old cold arrogance: *Now you'll never know who killed Cyrus.*

The doctor slapped him smartly on the minuscule behind. The wizened, malevolent face writhed open, but it was only the angry squall of an ordinary infant that came out.

Leo was gone, like a light turned off beneath the measureless ocean.

Moira raised her head weakly.

"Give him one for me," she said.

—DAMON KNIGHT

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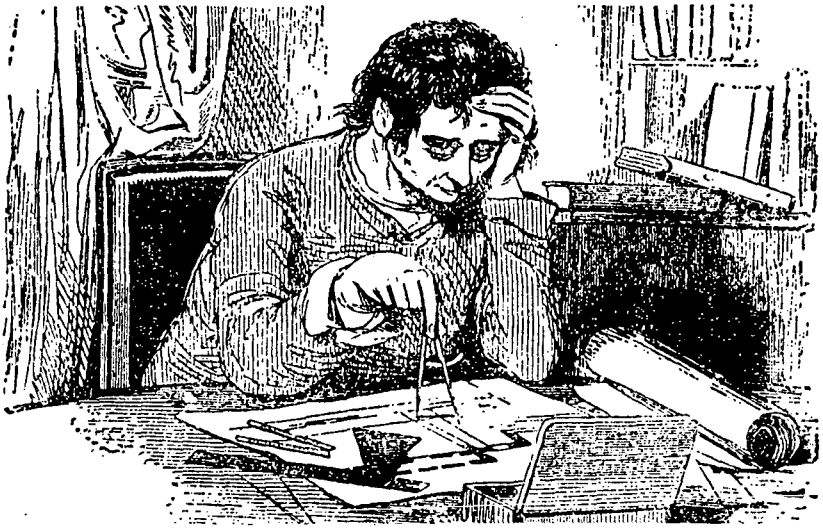

"My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated. - - - The moon gazed on my midnight labors, while - - - I pursued nature to her hiding-places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil - - - ."
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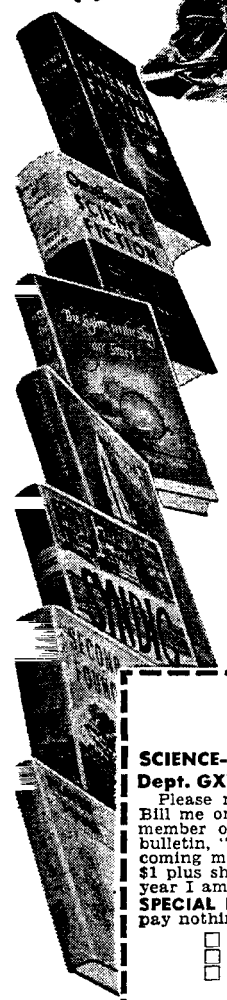

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